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Culture

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On Conscience & Related Concerns

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Editor's Comment

"Conscience, however, is not innate, but acquired: and varies with geography . . ."

—Spinoza

To Dostoyevski, and to the Russians *in toto*, conscience means goodness and sinlessness. Someone who just killed somebody is accused of lack of conscience. If we accept Spinoza's geographic theory, the American variety would be rather socially oriented. Pragmatism and practicality seem to have been irking the American soul for centuries. Blind faith, superstition, prejudice have variously been tried as counterbalances. Repulsive by nature, they couldn't count on lasting success with the American soul.

The American conscience thus became a respectable irrationality nicely grounded in rational decencies, later known as positive thinking. A blissful truce between reason and unreason was established once and for all, and turned into an ideology.

Conscience is a purely Judeo-Christian heritage, geared into the individualistic hierarchy of values. The supposition —that there is in each of us some contraption that tells us good from bad—is a venture of personalism and pluralism, the stalwarts of Western civilization. Other civilizations looked for more solid guarantees in regard to the distinction between good and evil. This does not mean they were less conscience-conscious, or that they minimized its need. They just couldn't afford it. Which brings us to the economics of conscience.

The general opinion prevails that conscience is a universal human attribute. Christianity locates it in anyone who is righteous, and claims that even the beastly among us have it as well, but of a quality that must be improved. Marx and Lenin, however, put a lot of effort into demonstrating, through countless examples of heinous class-exploitation, that only the poor and wretched have conscience while the rich are entirely devoid of it.

The fate of doing away with both views fell to America. I, for one, have always suspected that the bosom of affluence is where conscience blooms to the fullest. It's not exactly a matter of luxury, people of modest means certainly possess conscience if they insist and make sacrifices, nevertheless conscience flourishes better amidst material plenty where no sacrifice is necessary to voice moral outrage. Nations which developed, or conquered, wealth and abundance have always been the most eager to debate conscience and its obligations—although this rarely meant they followed its guidance, or felt an overwhelming urge to obey its judgments. As Europe was, for centuries, the center of the world's riches, through productivity or conquest, it was natural that a lot was spoken about conscience there. Whenever a European nation was licked by its stronger neighbors, it immediately adopted the title of "the conscience of Europe." Its laments were scarcely heard, since European oppressors were always masterful at keeping airtight lids of security and censorship over their oppressed. So available and resounding voices were usually from among the free, powerful and rich, whose independence—political, cultural and financial—amplified the moral torments of their conscience. Which makes me surmise that a business-like approach to conscience is as proper as any and, in fact, more beneficial in many respects.

First of all, conscience is a good deal, and not only in the metaphysical sense: we do not need Horatio Alger to know that sensitivity to goodness pays off in the long run, especially in the sociopolitical sphere. Secondly, dealing in conscience brings handsome and tangible profits in our day: conscience has proved an ideal fuel for thriving industries, a fabulous source of individual fortunes in both moral and pecuniary areas. Under one condition, however—namely that the activities of conscience take place within huge and complex social organisms, for only these can afford conscience both as a regulatory value and colloquial argument in the never-ending dispute about human affairs.

This is where America comes in. With its bustling, prosperous marketplace of ideas, America is able to invest in the most adventurous ways—even in conscience and its far-out excesses, its unreliability and caprices. This, naturally, distances America a bit from its current partners in the Judeo-Christian civilization, which nowadays can already afford to make daring investments, but consider the adventures and eccentricities of conscience, especially in foreign policy, an American obligation. Actually, nothing alienates America's admirers more than her experimentation with conscience, which they deem sociomoral antics. Occasionally, the frivolities of the American conscience, which, at first sight, appear to push America into the red, prove finally to land it in the black. Which makes Western Europeans shrug with bogus indulgence—a routine concealment of envy. This, once again, amply attests to the verity that it is the rich who really have conscience and can safely frolic with it.

* * *

This is how things look in a global and civilizational perspective. What remains is to situate conscience within our everydayness of social affairs, supermarkets and television. The quality of conscience—national, social, individual —is not immune to the laws of supply and demand: a surplus brings about devaluation of the marketed commodity. Therefore, if we care about American conscience—and I believe we all, regardless of our persuasions, do—something has to be done to improve that quality.

This, however, may prove to be a Herculean task. Conscience may thrive with material affluence and social plural-

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ism, but it certainly becomes a victim of elitism. The Liberal Culture, which for so long has claimed a monopoly on conscience, obviously turns into its most destructive wrecker. To the "relativists," as Rabbi Schiller calls the libcultural activists and gurus in his book (reviewed in this issue), conscience is a matter of stimulating incoherence, which in itself is the yeast of the Liberal Culture. The elites take pleasure in making conscience as elusive and esoteric as possible, this gives them a sense of elevation, superiority, freedom from pedestrian notions of right and wrong, good and bad. They indulge in freakish "psychology" as a substitute for social and private morality, and look to it that paralyzing banalities become "wisdom," "science," "knowledge."

But people desperately try to live their lives unaffected by the Liberal Culture. It's not easy in America, stricken by the libcultural "conscience." The *Playboy*-cum-*Hustler*-cum-*Penthouse* operations clamor for the freedom to display certain aspects of life and human persons, not a transgressive demand in terms of laws, but cultural thuggery in its effectual creation of a social and behavioral climate which erodes both the general sense of normalcy and, consequently, the conditions under which people attempt to live their lives as they wish. This is what makes the liberal elitism in America offensive to anyone with an unwarped conscience.

—Leopold Tyrmand

Philosophy in America

"O philosophy, thou guide of life, O thou explorer of virtue and expeller of vice!"
—Cicero, 45 B.C.

Every philosopher has his moment of tender incertitude, an hour of self-examination, a time of reckoning—when he sees himself at the mercy of impossibility which transcends his forces of cognition and judgment. That monumental Chicago sage, Mr. Hugh Hefner, who devoted his life to discovering and defining the noumenon of carnality, is no exception. He thus confessed, in a recent issue of *Playboy*, an epistemological journal founded 25 years ago to disseminate Mr. Hefner's philosophy, his portraits, and the auxiliary materials indispensable for the study of his ideas:

> "It's been a personal adventure, and I've taken people along with me . . . Everything that has happened to me has been a product of my own adolescent dreams and aspirations. I have lived out my dreams as a kind of surrogate for a large part of the population."

He then announces a mind-boggling revelation, one which in itself irrevocably proves the tremendous power of Mr. Hefner's indomitable and investigative brain:

> "But I have learned something very interesting. And that is that women, although they say they like a faithful and monogamous man, are very attracted to a man who has . . . had a lot of romantic experiences. The more experienced you are, the more desirable you are to a woman. If a woman knows you have been with a great many beautiful women, she somehow finds that a very attractive thing."

Gee! No one ever knew that! □

Most of the commentary about the harmful impact of television and most of the efforts to improve matters have responded to the symptoms rather than the disease. To be sure, it would be a step in the right direction to have a decrease in the violent and sleazy programs that are broadcast, but a civilized society is neither built nor sustained by a cultural avoidance of the worst in human nature. A worthy and productive society is characterized by the prevalence of high-minded, responsible citizens. A public respect for the principles of honor and virtue and thrift and useful accomplishment can only be perpetuated with continuous and effective reaffirmation in literature and drama and education and religion, and by the examples of parents and fellow employees as well as public figures.

—from *Persuasion At Work*, February 1979, Vol. II, No. 2, "TELEVISION: POWERFUL ADVERSARY OF CAPITALISM AND POTENTIAL ALLY".

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The Reviewer as Cultural Critic

Diana Trilling: *Reviewing the Forties;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; New York.

by Charles Moser

If this compilation were nothing more than a collection of reviews, one might feel uncomfortable in discussing it, rather as if one were writing about writing about writing. Although mechanically it is a gathering of some of the regular columns which Mrs. Trilling wrote as a working reviewer of current fiction for the *Nation* from late 1942 to 1949, in its entirety *Reviewing the Forties* is more than the sum of its parts. It is, indeed, a cultural document in its own right, one which deals with a major constituent element of any nation's culture: its imaginative fiction.

The literary element of a culture is comprised not only of works by its well-known authors—the John Herseys, Saul Bellows, Truman Capotes and others—but also of much underbrush, the ephemeral writings which soon drop from our explicit cultural consciousness. In an age before the advent of television—and, at least for the intelligentsia, to a considerable extent thereafter—fiction provides the images through which a culture conceives of itself even though they may sometimes contradict reality. In addition, the culture acts upon literature, even to the extent of occasioning a literary debacle. Thus Mrs. Trilling attributes the failure of Merriam Modell's *The Sound of Years* (1946) to an "imbalance between the quality of her perceptions and the quality of her literary standards": contemporary American culture provided Modell with no image of the heroine she should have brought forth in her book, and she was insufficiently "revolutionary" as a writer to create that image by herself.

Mrs. Trilling held up under the pressures of regular reviewing for a journal of high quality and great prestige, for she had a lively sense of the importance of fiction to a culture. "Literature," she writes, "is no mere decoration of life but an index of the health or sickness of a society . . . so the debasement of our literary standards reflects a loss of standard throughout our lives." Literature is a serious matter for her, and she succeeds in transforming the reviewing of transitory novels into a facet of social and cultural criticism. One could go so far as to argue that mere plot summaries supplied by reviewers can provide a valuable approach to a culture of a given time and place, for they tell us what "stories" are deemed possible in that culture.

A culture embeds, among other things, a certain network of ideas, and Mrs. Trilling as cultural critic is much more concerned with things of the mind. She believes firmly that there is a distinction to be made between good and bad ideas, which may have favorable or evil consequences for the culture in which they circulate. And novels have much to do with the dissemination of ideas. "There is no such thing as a novel *without* ideas," she comments in discussing Bellow's *The Victim.* "A good novel has good ideas, a bad novel has bad ideas." This view leads her not only to praise good books, but to damn bad ones, as when, for instance, she condemns Allan Seager's *Equinox* as a "mad, bad, and dangerous book." As a working reviewer she stands in no superstitious awe of print. She knows that, just as books may improve their readers' minds, so also may they corrupt them.

Her concern with the intellectual aspect of fiction leads Mrs. Trilling to some interesting if controversial evaluations of major writers. For instance, she finds Vladimir Nabokov's *Bend Sinister* uninspiring, and decides that it is "written in a claustrophobic style in which the reader's mind is allowed to do no work of its own." Again, she complains that George Orwell's *1984* exerts undue "pressure" upon the reader, by which we must assume that she means intellectual pressure leading to acceptance of the author's intellectual premises. Mrs. Trilling apparently believes that the successful author must stimulate the play of his reader's mind within suitable parameters without imposing excessive constraints upon him or compelling him to adopt a certain point of view.

Mrs. Trilling rarely mentions "literary art" in her reviews, but she is sufficiently sensitive to this aspect of fiction to recognize that novels are not *merely* intellectual exercises. Thus, for example, while opposing on the intellectual level certain "false notions" injected into American culture by Ernest Hemingway, she also avers that he is a "good writer." She pays homage to the "marvelous resources of language" exhibited in Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men,* for she thinks that language can scarcely be "matched in American fiction." And yet too, something is missing at the core of Warren's book: a sense of the "inner human mystery," and beyond that "the mystery of the historical process." Thus there are things in literature which the reviewer must recognize intuitively: artistic quality, for one, and a feeling for the important elements of life which cannot be discursively analyzed but only depicted through the medium of art.

One of those elements is style. In literature as in life, it is not merely ideas which are important, but the style in which they are clothed. Personal style enables us to recognize a writer

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as an individual. But style must be genuine, and no imitation: in the course of assessing Herman Wouk's *Aurora Dawn* Mrs. Trilling properly points out that "stylization is never style, and . . . there is something wrong with a society which thinks it is." Moreover, as style is to an individual, so is culture to a society: as important as the values which a particular society embraces are the ways and customs in which they are embedded. (Mrs. Trilling sometimes speaks of "cultural tone," in a subtle refinement of the notion of culture.) Finally, the individual novelist's style exists in a complex symbiosis with the cultural style within which the author moves. At one extreme, indeed, Mrs. Trilling argues in speaking of Eudora Welty that "style and . . . cultural attitude are not separable," that the individual writer and his cultural ambience may be so closely entwined as to form a species of unity.

As a balanced cultural critic, however, Mrs. Trilling recognizes that, as vital as style and craftsmanship are, they may sometimes be given excessive significance. For instance, in 1947 she complained of the "marked ascendancy of craft over conscience" in contemporary American literature: "probably there has never been a time when so many people wrote so 'well' as now but to such meager purpose; when, indeed, the emptier a novel's content, the surer its technical proficiency." While an individual's or a culture's style must be genuinely individual, then, it must also be utilized to express worthwhile cultural content. When the correct balance of ideas with intuitive grasp of the mystery of the human condition is clothed in an individual style, a fine novel may result.

Ideas and culture often intersect in politics and engender the political novel, a special category with which any reviewer must deal. Mrs. Trilling's reaction to Charles Mills' book of 1943, *The Choice*, is instructive in this regard. She instinctively recoils from the cultural tone of Mills' book, for it springs from a Southern culture from which she feels alienated: despite its many strengths, she finds *The Choice* "distressing" because it is also politically "right-wing" (Mills makes his sympathies with Italian fascism explicit).

The 1940s were a political decade, and the political element in Anglo-American culture at that time had to be dealt with. It is not that politics could not be successfully incorporated in fiction: in 1944 Mrs. Trilling praised Katherine Anne Porter's novelette "The Leaning Tower," describing the rise of Nazism in the Germany of 1931, as a "remarkable literary-political document," an "analysis of political forces without political analyses." But it is rare for an anti-fascist novel to succeed as literature: more commonly such books resemble Stefan Heym's *Hostages* (1942), about the Germans in Czechoslovakia, which Mrs. Trilling dismisses as "only a grand-scale thriller," and not "serious anti-fascist literature." "*Kitsch* walks in," she says of it, "where better intelligences may fear to tread."

Right-wing novels in the 1940s were, not surprisingly, considerably less numerous than left-wing novels. To be sure, many such novels—for example those by Ilya Ehrenburg and Anna Seghers—are translations of foreign works, but Mrs. Trilling has little sympathy on the whole for homegrown left-wing fiction, if only because of its terrible simplification of real life. She dissents from the general approbation which led to a Pulitzer Prize for John Hersey's *A Bell for Adano* in 1945, decrying it as "primitive" and suggesting that it was honored for reasons of "political partisanship." "Mr. Hersey's political fears," she comments, "never suggest a valid and useful complication of ideas or feelings."

Mrs. Trilling by no means denies any place to politics in literature, for politics and culture are often enough inextricably intertwined. Rather she believes a writer must remain free, not "internally bound" in a phrase Ivan Turgenev perceptibly applied to Leo Tolstoy in speaking of *War and Peace;* and that commitment to a political ideology is among the surest ways for a writer to lose his internal freedom. She may be said to be politically an honest centrist, one capable of perceiving the good and the bad in varying political camps. As she phrases it succinctly at one point: "Democratic culture, fiercely on guard against encroachments from the right, calling them mystical or religious, on the one hand, or degrading to the individual, on the other, lets itself be insufficiently aware of the mysticism and the degradation of the individual which invade it from the left."

As a consequence of this attitude, Mrs. Trilling is willing to give conservative writing a fair hearing instead of discussing it out of hand. To be sure, she is frank to say that John B. Marquand allows himself to go too far in his commitment to traditionalism in *B. F.'s Daughter*, and she wishes that the later John Dos Passos's literary vision might have "widened . . . to the compass of tragedy" instead of narrowing "to the compass of bitterness." Nevertheless, she remains firm in her commitment to the importance of the individual, his ultimate responsibility for his own actions, his moral complexity, and indeed the final mystery at the core of human existence which only true art can begin to elucidate.

Mrs. Trilling is likewise independent in the evaluation of her own calling, that of book reviewer as cultural critic. She clearly recognizes the tendency of established reviewers to take entirely too positive a view of cultural trash provided merely that it presents itself as "serious" (for which read: pretentious). She plainly sees the intellectual snobbery endemic among book reviewers, as well as the "philistinism of the educated spirit" which she rightly considers at least as pernicious as the philistinism of the common man. Even by the 1940s, if we are to accept her evaluation, heterodoxy had become the new orthodoxy of the intellectuals, and

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that fact bodes ill for the future of American and Western culture. "Anarchy no longer has the power to jolt us," she wrote in May of 1949, "which means that we should perhaps take heed of our condition." The degradation of Western culture so evident 30 years later has proved her words prophetic.

Reviewing the Forties, then, is a partial record of a discriminating, independent, and interesting mind at work as cultural critic three decades ago. There can be no question of Mrs. Trilling's excellence as that special type of cultural critic, the reviewer of current books. It is still too early to say what her stature finally will be as a literary critic who assessed the permanent artistic worth of the numerous books which crossed her desk and about which she was compelled to write under the cruel pressure of deadlines.

A word should be added, however, about the manner in which this collection was prepared, especially since the dust jacket summary describes it as an "indispensable historical document." Each of the *Nation* columns included bears a date. The dates are so distributed that one assumes not all Mrs. Trilling's articles have been chosen for this volume (although this is nowhere explicitly stated), and that assumption is correct. The reader might very well not assume, however, that the selections here offered have been edited, for he is not so informed. A quick spot check of the original publications, however, shows that the pieces included in this collection have indeed been edited stylistically, sometimes fairly heavily, and in at least one instance in such a way as to alter the original meaning significantly. If this sort of alteration is to be done, the reader should be explicitly informed, and he should not be invited to regard the results as a "historical document." For that he will have to return to the *Nation* of the 1940s. □

Against Impotent Hopes and Living Despair

Ellen Schwamm: *Adjacent Lives;* Knopf; New York.

by Joseph Schwartz

Ellen Schwamm's first novel is on the surface quintessential contemporary New York. Her leading players appear to be fastidiously cultured and *au courant*. "They are barbarians." Caught up in the dread argument of the individual case, they are pursuers, themselves pursued by an *Angst* for which they cannot find a name. Natalie, distantly cool, and Tom, a prominent art critic, find themselves rather too suddenly embroiled in a tempestuous and unsatisfactory affair. Standing mutely on the sidelines "judiciously apart" is Gregory, Natalie's husband, a man of few ambiguities. Barbara, Tom's wife, is engaged in her own aggressive sexual search, repelled by Tom's impotent aestheticism. The realistic complication of children belonging to both marriages is briefly considered.

Natalie is the center of consciousness in the novel, although others occasionally play that part. The illness and death of Natalie's grandmother is the condition, if not the cause, of her affair with Tom, just as the suicide of her uncle is the condition of whatever poise she finally comes to when the affair ends. And therein lies the ethical center of the novel. "One cannot look directly at either the sun or death." Yet, in Natalie and Tom's Arcadia of sublime illusion, the death head grins: *et in Arcadia ego.* Their Arcadia is, ironically enough, the prayer rug in Tom's office upon which their grapplings and suckings and fumblings come to a cheerless end. The effort of treating each other seriously has been too strenuous.

Consumed by his dilettantish passions for art and gourmet cooking, Tom is unable to see real things. Terrified of death, he is relieved to regain his freedom when the affair ends. The reader gives no further thought to him, except for a passing reflection on his perfection as a type. He is superficial, childish, spoiled, and shallow—a user. "He likes disorder, cultivates it." Like the imitations of the Ch'ien-lung potters, he fools the eye but not the heart. Natalie's interest in Tom is a reflection of her passion for the refinement, simplicity, and order of genuine art. "For her it was an elixir." She recalls that the porcelain glaze on Chinese pottery was stumbled on by the great masters "when they were looking for the philosopher's stone or the *elixir vitae.*" While Natalie loves romance, she is not a true believer in romantic love. Other things are on her mind. She feels the dark encroachment of old catastrophe, and wonders. Capable of puzzlement and questioning, she is more than she appears to be in contrast to Tom who is so much less than he appears to be. She can be understood, if at all, only through the relationships she has with her grandmother, Hermine, and her Uncle Laszlo.

"Her education began with Hermine's death . . ." Natalie yearns for faith, an essential principle. Facing her grandmother's death, she wishes that Hermine "had not blackened the idea of faith quite so assiduously." How can she be so conscious of having fallen from grace, she asks, when she does not believe in it. As much as she wants it, sincere faith strikes Natalie as a neurotic desire. Hermine's private diaries, left to Natalie, explain the reasons for her convictions. Deeply puritanical and self-sacrificing, she rejected both self-in-

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terest and God, convinced that real life and a life of faith cannot be lived simultaneously. "The Church frightens her." Love is no solution to the human problem: only duty can sustain one. In an age characterized by the failure of all "Grand Ideas," small works of personal conscience are the sole alternative. All ritual and symbol are false, standing for nothing. The good deed in and of itself is the only source of authority. And loneliness is man's portion. When Natalie goes to church to light a candle for her, she wonders if Hermine will approve. In any event, church is not what Natalie wants. She cannot pray, no matter how much she yearns for the life of the spirit. It is, for the time being, only curious comfort that she finds in her bedside Kierkegaard. His "lonely lovely" leap of faith is "too broad a jump for her unathletic self." The idea appeals to her, the reader should note, because it is impossible to achieve. Her religious woolgathering is given a striking objective correlative in the hospital.

Hermine shares her room with a Mrs. Miller who also has a dutiful visitor, Wilhelmina. They talk and laugh. Wilhelmina handles her friend with care and love, physically touching her, crooning to her as if she were a baby. "I'm talking to God, praying for these here women, these poor lambs. Prayer is the only thing which helps, Missus." All Natalie can do for her grandmother is smooth the blanket, "no more than that." Much later, thinking of Wilhelmina's advice, Natalie, not knowing any prayers, thinks but cannot say out loud a poem:

> "We will die, & the evidence
> is: Nothing after that. (Hermine?)
> Honey, we don't rejoin.
> The thing meanwhile, I suppose,
> is to be courageous & kind. (Laszlo?)"

The question remains as to whether or not this bleak secular humanism is in any way finally satisfactory. Natalie knows that her grandmother's philosophy is not satisfactory. After searching a lifetime, after giving up God, Hermine "never got close" to an answer. Natalie is not comforted by the belief "that those you take into your memory continue to live on in you," and this is as far as Hermine's "inquiry into the spirit" had taken her. "It is not far enough for Natalie." Hermine's ascetic stoicism did not enable her to endure her own littleness. Her overwhelming desire for something to be sure of was never satisfied. Instead she settled for pain. The death of a spiritual bankrupt is grim. Yet, Uncle Laszlo, courageous and kind, remains.

Laszlo is engaged in a permanent war against private money, a second-generation Marxist, the worst kind of snob. Thriving on the rivalry between wealth and learning, he subverts "this struggle to his own purpose." Neither an intellectual nor a rich man, he has, nevertheless, the intellectual's contempt for money and the rich man's suspicion of the intellect. "Only the cause matters." A bachelor, he is enormously upset by his mother's death but finds the courage to serve his cause with energy. With Hermine's death the liaison with his mistress, Vivianne, takes on another dimension: it threatens to become an authentic relationship. But like Tom, Laszlo cannot engage himself in real things. When confronted by the gift of life offered him by his now pregnant mistress (Vivianne: life), he commits suicide. Where now are Laszlo's courage and kindness? The shocking sight of Vivianne, "frail and broken, leaning on Natalie's arm like an elderly convalescent," is a striking indictment of the courage and kindness which secular humanism is supposed to make real. Suicide is not a private matter; it threatens the community and is hard to forgive. For the suicide the suspicion that life is not worth living has hardened "into a certainty."

Natalie's own sense of spiritual bankruptcy now seems to be final. The aestheticism symbolized by Tom, the courage and kindness represented by Laszlo and his projects, and the cold common sense of Hermine have all failed to sustain her. Her rich, unsystematic insights have led only to confusion. What she has failed to learn is how "to take reality as truth." How is the ruthless and magisterial self to be mastered? Yet, like the protagonist of *The Waste Land*, she has some fragments to shore against her ruin. Her children, her husband, Vivianne and the anticipated baby, memories of Hermine's moving half-truths, and her bedside readings, "those which speculate on the nature and existence of God." She begins to acknowledge life for what it really is, having been forced to look directly at death. "She no longer has a quarrel with it nor will she as long as it doesn't prevent her discovering what it is that is required of her; what it is she requires of herself." What she has discovered is suggested in a very daring final chapter.

> "Gregory is Natalie's husband; Barbara is Tom's wife . . . The affair is not their 'fault.' "
>
> —*Ms. Magazine*

Natalie is a professional translator, and our final view of her is teaching a class in the art of translation. She tells the class that translation is an attempt at the impossible. What keeps one going is aspiration, the "hope of redemption for our imperfect selves." Translation is like the wrong side of a tapestry (real life) on which figures appear partially obscured. The metaphor suggests St. Paul's notion of seeing through a glass darkly. Were one able to view the right side of the tapestry, one would see without obscurity (clearly) the completely defined wholeness of it all. So, too, she suggests is the case of language. It is not too difficult to get hold of the literal meaning of a word or sentence; "it's

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the real meaning, the soul of the word or phrase or thought, that must be uncovered or one winds up with . . . jargon." Since translation points toward an infinite goal, "much along the way is veiled or hidden, as on the wrong side of a tapestry." Hence, the translator learns humility by seeking obscurity in the graceful doing of his work. The past tense admits memory. The present tense makes it possible to exist in the moment. "There are always the imponderables," but for that we have the future tense, the tense of dreams. I think Schwamm wants the reader to see this elaborate scheme as a valid symbolic ritual which expresses the kind of poise Natalie achieves. The potent and efficacious meanings of "word," "soul," "redemption," and "infinite goals" resonate with each other in patterns which are historical givens for most readers. "Through the act of translating, we learn or relearn or uncover for ourselves the real meaning of words we have been using or misusing all our lives." I think further that Schwamm intends for the reader to remember at this point Wilhelmina's utter simplicity, "God be the only proper teacher." If I am right in my speculation, it would not be too much to say that such Godly adumbrations have unveiled signals of the transcendent for Natalie. After all, a girl who bears the name Natalie is named after Christmas, for "Natalie" comes from the Latin *dies natalis*.

Adjacent Lives is a telling critique of the legacy of modernism: the belief in mind ruled by a sense of self and energized by a hope in man's capacity to rescue himself through projects. In the dark cultural period we uneasily inhabit, I am tempted to grasp at and praise any attempts to question the status quo from the transcendent perspective. In an era characterized by fragmentation, it is often the case that only fragments are to be found. Schwamm's protagonist, despite her background and environment, is not locked into the impotent hopes and living despair which have been the legacy of modernism. Readers less willing to settle for half a loaf may suggest that the speculations of Natalie have little foundation in reality. They might be inclined to see her as a spiritual dilettante entertaining her aspirations in a way which requires no hard commitments. Perhaps. But I would urge such readers to consider Schwamm's keen diagnostic powers and the resulting ironies scattered plentifully throughout the work. While these ironies are not done playfully enough, they are clearly friends of the reader directing him to her thematic conclusions.

Schwamm is right on the mark in her penetrating analysis of the failure of the old-time radical, the failure of the cold intellect which breeds the inability to love, and which calculatedly dismisses the human factor. Hawthorne would have recognized and ratified Schwamm's depiction of the unforgivable sin. Her loving portrait of Laszlo is not sentimentalized: her vision is clear. It is a simple fact that he has no equipment to deal with reality when he must take it full in the face.

Admittedly, Natalie is not the luminous portrait one would like to have as a counterpoint to those whom she goes beyond. She does, nevertheless, raise her voice against the cant that threatens all of us. Her tentative and fragile affirmation is limited, but to expect something more (and I do) would be in this instance to force the character beyond her carefully fabricated limits. □

The Charms of Profundity

Dorothy L. Sayers: *The Whimsical Christian;* Macmillan: New York.

by Thomas Molnar

Dorothy Sayers' book does not contain any piece of fiction, yet a reading of the first half, the shorter essays, brought the old controversy about Catholic literature to my mind. I think it was André Gide who contended that a "Catholic novel" is a contradiction because the characters are bound to follow a certain pattern, ultimately derived from the Gospels: there are the good ones and the bad ones (destined for heaven or hell, respectively), and, after many tribulations, the hero becomes a near or far copy of Jesus Christ. Gide (or whoever it was) was proved wrong by Claudel, Eliot, Waugh, Mauriac, Bernanos, and others, but there remains a lingering impression that in a dechristianized world Catholic stories may have an uncomfortably stilted tone and a piety-laden style.

There are other pitfalls too for the Catholic writer, even when he does not touch the field of fiction. The dogma of Incarnation has given the Catholic writer a sixth sense, or, better put, a vigorous combination of the five, enabling him to detect the nature of reality, its solid position between extremes. The Scholastics called Aristotle *the* Philosopher because he taught, in contrast to Plato, that intelligence supplies us with basically reliable knowledge. Incarnation goes one better on Aristotle by suggesting, with a divine forcefulness, the rehabilitation of the body, thus the supreme guarantee for the knowledge of the world in which body and mind are together immersed. Chesterton illustrated this rockbottom realism with the "Father Brown" stories in which the priest—a detective, armed with the supernatural, walks with absolute sureness in the labyrinth of human behavior.

However, this quality has its drawback: the Catholic writer is irresistibly drawn to the teaching attitude, he

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is not so indignant with sin (he knows its origins and its wiles) as with error and foolishness, so he tends to turn his texts into *catechisms*, as a way of rectifying sloppy thinking, psychological misconceptions, vision deflected by appetites, and erratic behavior.

In a number of essays, Sayers succumbs to the catechetic style. In one of them, "The Dogma is the Drama," she outlines a countercatechism (she could not know that a decade after her death, the Dutch clergy would approve a far more perverse one), in order to illustrate people's wrong understanding of what Christianity is about. In two other essays, "Christian Morality" and "The Other Six Deadly Sins," the catechetic style is further utilized, and, particularly in the latter, Sayers luxuriates in the pleasure of explaining the mechanism of how sins are prompted and go unresisted. Come to think of it, C. S. Lewis often turns to similar devices (the catechetic approach), even in his masterpiece, *The Screwtape Letters*.

I am not saying this approach yields bad literature, only that didacticism often seems inseparable from what some call the Catholic style of writing. To my taste, only Mauriac and Bernanos succeeded completely in avoiding this trap: Mauriac, because his Catholicism was of the Jansenist type where sin is inevitable; Bernanos, because in three novels, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, *The Joy*, and *The Impostor* (but particularly in the first of these), he managed the impossible: write credible fiction about sainthood.

If we further analyze the malaise of the reader confronted with some of the writings of Sayers, Lewis, Claudel, Eliot, et al., we find that they often amount to *disguised apologetics* (Bernanos kept clear of this threat to all literature)—again because these writings are addressed to a public which, believer or not, lives in an ambience of devastating secularism. Instead of being militantly denied as in Soviet Russia, the "religious" is just one of the "dimensions" of the liberal/secularized (lib/sec?) world—which may be the reason why Russian Christian writers today do not feel compelled to use the catechetic approach, whereas Western Christian writers often do. Particularly in Anglo-Saxon countries, Catholic literature is tempted to offer a whitewashed hygiene of the soul and adopt the tone of puritanic *pudeur*. Although not excusable, this is at least comprehensible since as an advertisement in the New York subway instructs us, religion is the way "people worship today: nutritional programmes for older people, nursery schools for children of working mothers, transportation of senior citizens, countless activities . . . Become active through your church or synagogue. Find yourself—with people who worship." No wonder that excellent writers like Lewis and Sayers cannot resist the urge to (re-) catechize this marshmallow Christianity.

The Sayers volume becomes excellent (not just edifying) reading in the longer essays of literary scholarship: on allegory, where she brilliantly argues the causes which made the science of three centuries reject it and the present age, for example psychoanalysis, readmit it; on Dante; on the Oedipus myth; the Faust legend. It is a delight to watch her demythify Freud's false myth about Oedipus and give the theme its paradigmatic scope. Or, in "Creative Mind," watch her explode the scientist's effort to render a precise scientific description of reality out of words which must also serve—such is the nature of language—the humanities. This essay ought to be the right antidote to whoever had ingurgitated C. P. Snow's *Two Cultures*, the in-thing two decades ago.

The Faust legend presents her with an occasion to blend scholarship, deep faith, and literary vision, as she examines the Devil figure in Marlowe, Milton, Goethe and Byron. Here, like in other essays, her special quality is to show the parallels between the changes of Christian sensitivity and the literary expression. It is the last essay of the volume, so the end is appropriate: Miss Sayers turns once more, in a departing gesture, to the poet she places high above all others, "the greatest poet, the most exact theologian, the most adult intellect"—Dante. □

Books in the Mail

A Hymnal: The Controversial Arts by William F. Buckley, Jr.; G. P. Putnam's Sons; New York. A collection of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s recent writings.

The Relevance of Edmund Burke edited by Peter J. Stanlis; P. J. Kenedy and Sons; New York. Analyses of Burke's concepts of Natural Law in relation to contemporary issues.

American Cause Special Reports by Charles J. V. Murphy and James Angleton; American Cause; Washington, D.C. A limited edition devoted to various U.S. policies.

The Servile State by Hilaire Belloc; Liberty Fund, Inc.; Indianapolis. A new edition of Belloc's classic 1913 forecast of capitalism's transformation into today's welfare, or "servile," state.

Energy Perspectives edited by Milton R. Copulos; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, D.C. A series of articles which addresses the major controversies surrounding the energy debate.

Fisher's Concise History of Economic Bungling by Antony Fisher; Caroline House Books; Ottawa, Illinois. An overview of economics through history and suggestions on how America can avoid the economic decline of Britain.

The Machinery of Freedom: Guide to Radical Capitalism by David Friedman; Arlington House; New Rochelle, New York. A libertarian approach for doing away with big government.

The Inflation Crisis, and How to Resolve It by Henry Hazlitt; Arlington House; New Rochelle, New York. An explanation of the mechanics and remedies of inflation.

The Politics of Prosecution: Jim Thompson, Marje Everett, Richard Nixon & The Trial of Otto Kerner by Hank Messick; Caroline House Books; Ottawa, Illinois. An account of the people and events behind the Otto Kerner trial.

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American MacArthur

William Manchester: *American Caesar:* Little, Brown and Co.: Boston.

by Alan Levine

William Manchester has written what is probably the best one-volume biography of General Douglas MacArthur. Though not unflawed, it offers considerable insights into MacArthur's complex personality and relationships. *American Caesar* is well-written in spite of occasional lapses into a dialect similar to "Timese," and attempts to be cutesy —Manchester frequently refers to the Japanese as the "Nipponese." It is essentially fair-minded, though Manchester does sometimes measure MacArthur by the anachronistic, and perhaps ephemeral standards of a later day —does it make any sense to refer to MacArthur as a "male chauvinist"? The false analogy with Julius Caesar implied in the title cannot be taken very seriously. Fortunately, however, Manchester himself does not seem to take it very seriously either, and it is not allowed to warp the book. Nor does it prevent Manchester from presenting a favorable, even perhaps occasionally too favorable, view of MacArthur, whom he regards as the most gifted of American generals.

One of the best aspects of Manchester's book is his treatment of MacArthur's early life. Like his very distant relative, Franklin D. Roosevelt, MacArthur was dominated and propelled by a formidable mother. While growing up in a succession of isolated Army posts he acquired an amazingly broad education and cultural tastes. It was perhaps because of this that he was able to easily dominate his peers at West Point, which was an educational wasteland even in military matters until MacArthur himself instituted reforms in the 1920s. Manchester does not make clear whether this, or MacArthur's fanatical perfectionism, was the source of his fantastic egomania and vanity. Though Manchester perhaps overemphasizes these unpleasant characteristics, which are after all no more important historically than Cyrano de Bergerac's nose, they are the only serious flaws that he exposes in MacArthur. To paraphrase Churchill's remark about Attlee, MacArthur was a vain man, but he had much to be vain about.

Manchester's account of MacArthur's military career is generally excellent, though the section on the Pacific War is marred by quite a few inaccuracies in small details, none of which, however, bear on Manchester's arguments or his high evaluation of MacArthur's generalship. Manchester does err, however, in portraying MacArthur's relationship with Admiral Nimitz's command in the central Pacific as a perpetual clash over which theater should launch the main offensive against Japan. It is an interesting, though little known fact that for a time early in 1944, Nimitz and his planners swung over to backing MacArthur's concept of a single drive from New Guinea to the Philippines. Admiral King, MacArthur's eternal enemy among the Washington brass, intervened to force Nimitz to abandon this position and resume the central Pacific drive. It is also uncertain that MacArthur's relationship with George Marshall was a permanent feud going back to World War I, as Manchester and many other writers have maintained.

One mystery that Manchester does not solve is why MacArthur was so unpopular with ordinary soldiers during World War II. How did a man who exhibited courage bordering on recklessness throughout his life acquire the tag "Dugout Doug"? In the First World War, by contrast, he was very popular with his men. Manchester argues that between the world wars Americans had been influenced by a growing mood of "antiauthoritarianism" and "antiheroism"; soldiers were offended by MacArthur's obvious enjoyment of command, his gold-encrusted cap, and the egocentric tone and awful inaccuracies of his communiques. (Among other faults, MacArthur regularly announced that battles and campaigns had been finished long before they actually were.) I doubt that Manchester's analysis of changes in the American national character is correct—if such a thing actually exists—but in any case other commanders managed to surpass MacArthur's faults without attracting such hostility. MacArthur may have issued distorted communiques, but he never let considerations of personal prestige affect his conduct of operations, as Mark Clark did during the advance on Rome in 1944. Admiral Halsey was respected, and even popular, though in 1942 he announced that the Allies would be in Tokyo by the end of 1943, and boasted that he would ride through Tokyo on

"Douglas MacArthur is one of the major embarrassments of American history."

—*Time*

"The pro-MacArthur tilt of the book is equally obvious in small ways. Any part of the MacArthur makeup, including his bladder, can take on heroic qualities."

—*New York Times Book Review*

Mr. Levine is a historian and a frequent contributor to these pages.

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the Emperor's white horse. MacArthur never said anything nearly as outrageous. A possible explanation is that the ordinary GI (unlike the people at home) was acutely conscious that MacArthur had suffered a defeat in the Philippines from which only he and a few others had escaped. The fact that MacArthur never visited the front at Bataan or during the first campaign in New Guinea was enough to nourish the "Dugout Doug" fantasy. A real source of grievance developed later in the war because MacArthur did not use the possibilities offered by the War Department to rotate veterans. Though he did have good reasons for this, it evoked the understandable gibe "Join Mac—and never come back," and doubtless less printable things.

Manchester rightly gives MacArthur high marks for the occupation, the part of his career the General himself was most proud of. As the British upper class learned centuries ago, benevolent despotism in a foreign land can be great good fun, and MacArthur certainly enjoyed himself to the profit of both Americans and Japanese. Yet his judgment was so little corrupted that he favored terminating the occupation as early as 1947. An interesting discovery in reading Manchester's book is that liberal opinion was just as confused and revengeful about dealing with Japan as it was with Germany.

Manchester is less sure of himself in dealing with the issues raised by the Korean War and the Truman-MacArthur dispute, though he is careful to refute some of the exaggerated partisan suspicions that have crept into accounts of this controversy. He is, however, too uncritical of MacArthur's mishandling of the advance in North Korea in November 1950. Manchester is skeptical of the Truman administration's conduct of the war; as he points out, MacArthur was never given clear objectives after the Chinese entered the war. Truman reduced MacArthur, a Roosevelt-hater, to spells of nostalgia for FDR's leadership during World War II.

But, though he intimates that the conduct of the Korean War as a disastrous precedent for the fumbling of the Second Indochina War, he fails to reach any clear-cut conclusion. Manchester does refute one or two of the sillier arguments against MacArthur's program, notably the claim that our European allies would have broken with us in protest against an "expansion" of the war. It is of course true that the critical question of how the Soviets would have reacted to blockading and bombing China in 1951 cannot be answered today. But, like John Spanier and other liberal chroniclers of the Truman-MacArthur controversy, Manchester has failed to notice, much less discuss, how the Korean War was actually brought to an end. That was accomplished only after the Eisenhower administration threatened to employ tactical nuclear weapons in Korea and attack targets in China; i.e., after the United States threatened to carry out something like MacArthur's program.

American Caesar will not replace D. Clayton James' multivolume biography of MacArthur for the purposes of specialists. But it is a satisfying portrait for anyone else. □

Colorfully Human Fiction

Stephen Alter: *Neglected Lives;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.
Norman Kotker: *Miss Rhode Island;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

by Whit Stillman

"Negativism" in book reviewing has been too critically judged: people are always stressing its bad side, never the good. One of the few authors who has given this kind of negativism a fair appraisal is Isaac Bashevis Singer, the 1978 Nobel laureate for literature. In a July, 1970 interview in *Atlantic Monthly*, Singer said:

> "If you read magazines you are told every week that a few geniuses have arisen. At the end of the year the same magazines complain that nothing worthwhile has appeared in literature that year. The reviewers have suffered from amnesia, or else they don't care . . . If Moses came down from Sinai today with Ten Commandments, they'd say, 'These are the best Commandments we've had in a decade,' and then throw them into the garbage in the evening . . . There must come someone who will say we are poor in literature and also in criticism. I can see Gogol being resurrected and asking, 'What is the best book of the year?' and when he's handed *Portnoy's Complaint*, he'd want to go back to the grave."

Critical negativism is so justified, but in practice it tends to become tiresomely gloomy. Negativism does not have to be that way. There can be pleasure, and perhaps occasionally even joy, in reading luridly honest descriptions of what H. L. Mencken called "the desert of American fictioneering, so populous and yet so dreary." The one weighty objection to candid treatment is that it can be unkind to authors. But now that so many of them claim never to read their reviews, this concern has been largely obviated.

Stephen Alter's *Neglected Lives* is one of those novels which eludes the tactful approach. The author is twenty-two. He sets his tale in the isolated and decaying Indian hill resort of Debrakot. Lionel, the novel's protagonist, is an Anglo-Indian young man who has gotten a Hindu girl in trouble and retreated to live among the resort's dwindling Anglo-Indian community. General

Whit Stillman is publisher of American Spectator *and author of* Under the Condor—*a parody college novel.*

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Theodore and Mrs. Natalie Augden, close friends of Lionel's parents and his hosts in Debrakot, live in the shadow of their part British ancestry and wholly British upbringing. The venerable "torn between two cultures" theme is noisily raised and then allowed to drift away.

"A short first novel of unusual and exquisite quality."
—*The New Yorker*

"An important first novel with rich images, full characters, and a substantial theme."
—*Library Journal*

"*Neglected Lives* is a lovely book; I salute its author."
—Peter S. Prescott in *Newsweek*

That's the good part.

The two cultures Alter describes—three when the Moslems turn up—become under his hand less than one, and that not of the fascinating East. In Anglo-Indian Debrakot he creates a mock Winnetka or Scarsdale. It's liquor and libido—just as in the searing novelistic indictments of American suburbia popular one and two decades ago. *Neglected Lives* has almost everything in this regard: Mrs. Natalie Augden contemplating seduction of Lionel; General Teddy Augden suspecting that he is Lionel's real father; Natalie's violation when still in her teens by a young British official (counterpart in American fiction: rich college boy); Teddy's humiliation by a British officer (American counterpart: rich college boy); Salim, Lionel's eccentric fat friend (American counterpart: eccentric fat friend); and, just as in American novels, strange and tiring dream or hallucination sequences (it's not always made clear which). "An exotic world filled with life and color" says one obscure commentator quoted on the back of the book's jacket; "at once strange, appealing, and colorfully human" counters another.

To approach this strangely familiar exotic world Alter uses the narrative gambit most certain to fail—alternating first person monologue. It is the *Spoon River Anthology* as retold by a despondent juvenile. For example, Mrs. Natalie Augden's monotonous girlhood reminiscences are rendered in Alter's falsetto voice:

> "For Christmas Daddy brought me a doll from Calcutta. It wasn't like the English girl's. It had a wooden head, with painted black hair. It was fat. The clothes it wore were pale and ugly. It wasn't soft or warm, like I imagined the other doll was. I was angry with it and refused to hold it. Mother sat it in my chair at the dinner table. I threw it onto the floor. Mother spanked me and sent me to my room. She left me alone in my room and put the doll next to me on my bed. I threw it off after she went out. I lay there crying, listening to them eating dinner and laughing..."

Spoken aloud in a high voice and pronounced Anglo-Indian accent, with a long breath at the end of each clause, this passage is perhaps a convincing representation of how young Natalie might have talked. The section represents one seventh of Alter's "doll sequence," and that about one-one hundredth of the novel. Experienced readers will wonder whether this doll sequence is longer than the one which opens Colleen McCullough's *The Thorn Birds*, how it differs from Louisa May Alcott's or Edna Ferber's treatment of doll materials—and what to make of its obvious racism. Alter's version of how children speak evidently derives from considerable study of elementary school reading texts. The overall technique of matching narrative style to character he perhaps gets from James Joyce.

What could be called the moment of epiphany in *Neglected Lives* comes when, on a hunting jaunt, General Augden suddenly turns his carbine on Lionel and begins shooting. One wonders at first whether this is not another one of the novel's dream sequences, but—not so—all the characters are awake. Alter has prepared the reader for the General's behavior with an earlier mention of rogue elephants on senile rampages. After 147 pages, an end to the novel and its hero finally seems in prospect. But that is not to be. The general is buried in a fortuitous rock slide and dies, not Lionel. One senses an opportunity missed. Thirty pages later the novel does terminate. Lionel has taken Sylvia as his lawful wife. Construction has begun on the new road to Debrakot. The series of meaningless episodes has come to an end. The enigma of the Anglo-Indians remains.

* * *

Norman Kotker's *Miss Rhode Island* also remains. D. Keith Mano wrote a rave review of this book in the December 8 issue of *National Review*. Granting that every writer's style is unique—as with snowflakes—there's a notable similarity in the approaches of Mano and Kotker. They both write in a style that's intensely—almost gaudily—clever, closely worked and yet quickly moving. One immediate difference is that while Mano employs every device of punctuation, Kotker is infatuated with the full stop. A Kotker paragraph has the look of a skin-care product advertisement: Three word sentences. And four word sentences. And verbless five word sentences. Or. Just. A. Series. Of. One. Word. Sentences.

"Norman Kotker has written an elegant novel . . . almost elegiac in tone."
—*The New Republic*

As a vehicle for his talent in describing lovely young complexions in sentences of one word or more, Kotker has found the perfect story in this account of a Wellesley College girl who inad-

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vertently wins the "Miss Rhode Island" title and thus becomes a contender for "Miss America." The supposed sensibility of a Seven Sisters college girl is to be brought down upon the undoubted vulgarity of the beauty pageant world.

A condescending recent movie about a beauty pageant, *Smile*, now often appears in the television listings, along with a few made-for-TV imitations. For television programmers the appeal is obvious: the great ratings potential for a format which can accommodate pretty actresses galore.

For writers the subject seems to have two perverse attractions: the required chastity of pageant participants and the ugly aspects of American middle-class culture. With chastity abolished as a conventional virtue, the lives of those of whom it is still asked retain dramatic possibilities which screenwriters lust to explore. The clumsy satirical attack upon obvious middle American targets —as well as the cartoonish television representation of rich people—seem to be a part of a kind of "class imperative" which has New Class screenwriter/novelists satirizing, usually broadly, those "above" and "below."

The promise of something better which *Miss Rhode Island*, with its bright heroine, seems to offer is smothered in authorial brilliance. Where Stephen Alter contorts his voice to suit the supposed first person tone of his various characters, Norman Kotker puts all their thoughts into his own excessively clever voice. The capabilities of this voice are more interesting to him than his characters or their fates, and perhaps with good reason. It's a grim view from behind their eyes. But it's even uglier from his. Occasionally, the author will veer off into amazing punning soliloquies—"Miss Maine, I want to Bangor! Miss Mass., feel that ass!" and worse.

The clichés about characters "not coming alive" can and should be applied to *Neglected Lives* and *Miss Rhode Island;* but beyond technical failure—they seem to deny life, not just fail to create it. As to the old creative mission of the novel, Kotker is not interested, and Alter is not able. For whatever reason, the negative becomes so terribly accentuated in these books that to blandly greet them with appreciative remarks would involve almost a breach of faith; criticism is, in their cases, not attack but counterattack. There is a recipe for philistinism here, but with our popgun we are not going to kill off any masterworks. □

In Search of Cons* Appeal

Craig Schiller: *The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative;* Arlington House; New Rochelle, N.Y.

by Kenneth Kolson

Those who get excited about biorhythms, or who otherwise have a fetish for periodicity, can find much of interest in American electoral history. Since the founding of our republic there have occurred, at remarkably regular intervals, certain elections that may be termed "critical," in that they resolved old debates, defined new issues, and drew the lines of partisan combat for succeeding generations. It is generally agreed that these elections occurred in 1800 (the "revolution of 1800," according to Jefferson; it was the death knell of the Federalists); in 1828 (a second Adams vanquished; Jacksonian mobs flowed into Washington like the "revolting silo juices of Ohio" that were to turn Mencken's stomach a century later); in 1860 (the party system of a riven republic fails; the party of the Union prevails); in 1896 (McKinleyism triumphs over the silo juices); and in 1932 (McKinleyism expires; Big Brother is conceived). Each period is associated with a dominant party, and, as John Zvesper puts it, "each of these parties, although born in intense conflict, has yet been so victorious that it has been able to enforce its own principles as a consensus."

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*Conservative, of course.

Readers who have been keeping score will note that another electoral realignment was "due" during the 1960s. At the time there were good grounds for believing that it was occurring. For one thing, critical elections are often accompanied or preceded by strong third party movements (the Populists of 1892, for example, or the Progressives of 1924), and in 1968 the American Independent Party, apparently on cue, came close to throwing the presidential election into the House. Even the "surge" that so often follows on the heels of realignments seemed to have occurred with the Nixon landslide of 1972. Intelligent observers such as Kevin Phillips seemed justified in proclaiming an "emerging Republican majority."

But Jimmy Carter's victory in 1976 —so often attributed (wrongly) to his resurrection of the original New Deal coalition—now seems to have put the lie to the Realignment hypothesis, and gives new hope to regular Democrats and the practitioners of the Old Politics generally. What gives? It is now becoming evident (to me, at least; many political scientists would disagree) that the parties are not in the process so much of realigning as of assuming room temperature. Reports of their immortality, it seems, have been greatly exaggerated.

If the Democrats and Republicans (it is hard to know which has the more passionate death wish) do go the way of the dodo, it will not necessarily mean an end to the periodic convulsions that have punctuated American political history. Still, it is hard to know how

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principles can be expected to triumph in a nonpartisan political system. The American Way has been for principles to become synonymous with a party, and for those principles to be imposed during that party's period of dominance. Under the present circumstances conservatives are entitled to wonder whether their principles have any future in American politics: Republicans are right to wring their hands over their party's gloomy prospects; and an intelligent man (William Rusher, for example) can be expected to ask why the fortunes of the former should be inextricably wedded to the fate of the latter.

Craig Schiller's *The (Guilty) Conscience of a Conservative* raises these questions and more. It has as its thesis the contention that "the development and clarification of conservative theory are ultimately the only means of reviving the sagging political fortunes of American conservatism"; implicitly, the book suggests that the fate of conservatism does not depend on the survival of the GOP.

The first chapter of the book aims to measure the lengths to which mainstream conservatism—here represented by the *National Review*—is willing to go to stay in tune with the times. By orchestrating a sort of mock debate between William F. Buckley, Jr. and L. Brent Bozell, former editor of *Triumph*, Rabbi Schiller shows that today's "conservative" holds almost exactly the same opinions as yesterday's "liberal." Having made its peace with *Brown v. Board*, social security, etc., the editorial line of *NR* today is a sort of echo of the voice of '50s liberalism—*The New Republic*, for example. Rabbi Schiller does not mean to suggest that conservatism, properly understood, is an inflexible creed; a petrified vestige of premodern politics. His point is simply that "respectable conservatism no longer possesses the vitality and firmness that a strong grasp of basic principles, together with starkly advanced programs, automatically results in."

Chapter Two ("What is Conservatism?") seeks to remedy this situation: to discover what conservatives have in common with one another. It is a short course in modern conservative political thought, introducing us to the writings of M. Stanton Evans, Frank S. Meyer, Eric Voegelin, Frederick D. Wilhelmsen, Donald Atwell Zoll, Russell Kirk, and Thomas Molnar. His treatment of these writers, while cursory, is for the most part admirable. Those shying away, for whatever reason, from total immersion in this literature would find this essay quite useful.

Chapter Three explores the relation between conservatism and tradition, and Chapter Four analyzes the failure of four notable political campaigns that have been launched from the Right since the forging of the first New Deal coalition by FDR in 1932 (viz., the Landon, Taft, Goldwater, and Reagan campaigns). The moral of this story is that there are two things wrong with contemporary American conservatism:

> "First, the American conservative movement has failed to understand and relate to the aspirations of the majority of men. Second, the American Right has clung to an imagery that may have been appealing in the 1890s, but frightens the contemporary citizenry."

Chapter Five shows that a majority of Americans are, so to speak, latent conservatives. A review of the relevant survey data leads Rabbi Schiller to the following conclusions:

In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:*

The Oldest Conflict

"Writing about writers is a genre itself, and great and mediocre novelists have availed themselves of it because it affords so much opportunity for aimlessness *qua* freedom in the storytelling. That something poignant and artistic will emerge from a book about a writer is an assumption often made quite without reason."

from "Unintended Sadness and Unspeakable Confusion" by Edward J. Walsh

"One of our favorite pastimes in Moscow was discussing how quickly human beings everywhere take for granted *any* new reality as something inevitable, natural, usual. For example, we were sure that once the Soviet regime had been established in the United States, in no time at all Americans would just be puzzled that someone could see in it something unusual, avoidable or even interesting."

from "The Berlin Wall: To Be Taken for Granted" by Lev Navrozov

also:

Opinions & Views—Commendables—In Focus
Waste of Money—The American Scene
Screen—Liberal Culture
—Journalism—Polemics & Exchanges

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> "From these statistics it becomes apparent that the American citizenry is still very much committed to what may be described as a conservative position on the so-called social issues. Americans believe in God, Judeo-Christian morality, and traditional concepts of crime control. They will listen to legitimate calls for justice. Sadly, due to the leftist domination of the media, these facts are mostly overlooked."

The problem is that the rhetoric of conservative politicians—the rhetoric of Herbert Hoover and John Foster Dulles—offends the ordinary American. Those people who wear smile buttons, or who go around saying "Have a Nice Day" are not, as Gore Vidal maintains, "clones"; but they aren't conservatives either, precisely because they have embraced the sanguine liberal mindlessness of the lonely crowd. Their good-natured optimism means, as Rabbi Schiller knows, that they will not take instruction from a Hoover or a Dulles. So how are they to be approached?

In Chapter Six Schiller indicates that the successful conservative politician of the future would have to be a kind of American Disraeli. He would have to be perceived as identifying with the "common man"; he would need "both humor and humility"; he would have to show "a fervent loyalty to traditional faith and old-school patriotism"; and he would:

> "stand four-square against the abuses of the welfare state and four-square in favor of its legitimate practices. He would court the approval of special-interest groups like labor or ethnic minorities, but not in the manner of the liberal establishment, which caves in to their every demand; he would separate the justifiable from the absurd. Ideally, he would have risen from humble origins and thus could quite literally fulfill his image-projection."

Such a politician would be a fresh face indeed. For in America conservatism has all too often worn the dour, bah-humbugging countenance of John Adams. This brand of conservatism has served well to temper American liberalism, a creed that, while largely unexamined by its partisans, boils down to a belief in Progress and the love of equality; or, as Schiller puts it, to "egalitarianism, the innate goodness of man, and the infinite plasticity of human nature." The ubiquity of this creed means that the torch of liberalism may be carried, more or less gracefully, by even the most pedestrian of men. But the cause of conservatism, if it presumes to be something more than a dyspeptic reaction against the liberal creed, needs truly gifted leaders: men such as Washington, whose virtues made him seem larger than life even to his illustrious contemporaries, or Lincoln, whose humility and sense of irony rendered him immune to ideology. The greatest conservative leaders have been men who have eschewed the politics of passion, and of interest, and who, donning the Sweet Smile of Reason, have moved through a Hamiltonian world with all the serenity of Jefferson himself. Such men are rare; more ordinary fellows will need a little help from Dr. Frankensteins of Madison Avenue.

This brings up the one respect in which Rabbi Schiller's book is unsettling: it is quite clear that Schiller thinks that conservative politicians need to practice deceit (just one example: the successful conservative politician of the future, according to Schiller, would "have to enjoy—*or at least give the appearance of enjoying* [emphasis added]—crowds, handshaking, parades, press conferences, and all the rituals of mass-suffrage democracy"). In other words, pressing the flesh and exuding compassion for the downtrodden is designed as a cover for conservatism, which can't reveal its true face. Schiller seems to think that there is no difference between this type of deception and that of the New York City politician who honors a venerable American tradition by stuffing his face full of bagels, kielbasi, pizza, barbecued ribs, and canapés as he rides the circuit of ethnic neighborhoods. But this institution, like Tammany Hall itself, is harmless precisely because no one would ever dream of attributing anything ideological—anything liberal or conservative—to it. Schiller's American Disraeli, on the other hand, is at once more cerebral and more calculating. Since he doesn't come by his gregariousness naturally—the way Hubert Humphrey did, for example—there is something decidedly comical about him. One contemplates Schiller compiling an itinerary for his Disraeli (read Jack Kemp or Phil Crane) on the hustings:

6:30 AM	Breakfast with Buckley brothers
7:15	Tape interview with Phyllis George
9:00	Skull session with Eric Voegelin at Notre Dame
9:15	Greet workers at auto assembly plant; don cloth cap and bowling shirt
9:45	Rap session with Merv Griffin
10:25	Return Solzhenitsyn's phone call
10:30	Take limousine to Peoria, read Spengler en route
12:00	Chamber of Commerce luncheon; wear polyester leisure suit; order "lite" beer
2:30 PM	Confer with George Meany; smoke cigar
4:00	Visit workingman's bar in Gary; drink Stroh's
7:00	Deliver Leo Strauss lecture, University of Chicago.

And so on and on.

This juxtaposition of conservative philosophy with neopopulist imagery is wildly incongruous, to be sure. But

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in my heart I suspect Schiller is probably right. When one considers the swollen ranks of middle-class socialists and Gucci liberals, then maybe there's nothing so remarkable about working-class or bourgeois tories. And turnabout *is* fair play, after all. Pass the Stroh's, Rabbi. □

Youth's Labors Lost

David Holbrook: *A Play of Passion;* W. H. Allen; London.

by Gordon Pradl

Has there ever been an adult who at first blush did not wax nostalgic over adolescence? We seem to have an endless capacity for such idealized retrospection. Yet when these reflections are challenged, we readily admit to the pain and suffering, the clumsy and awkward moments, that actually characterized the series of passages preceding adulthood. Indeed, it would be hard to disagree with the extreme position Shakespeare expresses in *A Winter's Tale,* "I would there were no age between ten and three and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest. For there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting." Although youth might well have been a time of boundless possibility before our categories froze and "shades of the prison-house began to close upon the growing boy," essentially it was a time of things only half-known, the "blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realized."

The trials that an adolescent faces involve seeking answers to what it means to be an adult, to what makes for life and what works against it. For this quest to be successful, for the agony of youth not to be offered up in vain, adolescents need an image of a coherent adult world they can eventually merge with. They need a facilitating environment, one which fosters integrative social values, as they struggle to infuse meaning into their probing relationships with the opposite sex, into their search for a fulfilling vocation, and into their desire for a creative interplay between self and community. Such are the major themes the British poet and novelist, David Holbrook, takes up in his latest novel, *A Play of Passion,* which chronicles the transitional seventeenth year in the life of Paul Grimmer whom we first met as a young tank officer in *Flesh Wounds,* (1966) Holbrook's powerful and graphic recreation of events surrounding the D-Day invasion of Normandy.

In *A Play of Passion* the time is 1940, the place Norwich, an east coastal town particularly susceptible to the hostilities that have already broken out. Thus the disintegrating social values which concern Holbrook have their concrete analogue in the missiles which nightly threaten the well-being of the city. Paul Grimmer is completing his final year of school before going up to Cambridge, but his benevolent and progressive headmaster has decided that at this particular juncture additional book-learning would not benefit him, so he has arranged for Paul to work part-time at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich. This opportunity places Paul in the larger world of art and imagination, while providing him with new bearings as he begins shaping his identity, independent of his parents and free of the materialism which clashes so with his youthful idealism.

Paul's idealism grows out of his inner feelings of communion with the ebb and flow of the natural world, an at-oneness Holbrook evokes for us early in the novel as Paul is slowly gliding down a river in a small rowboat.

> "As he watched a shoal of very small fish all lying in the same direction, and then suddenly all turning at once, to face another direction, translucent yellow, with a similar but distinct masking pattern on each back—he knew that he existed in a meaningful world. He could not formulate any meaning in relation to it; nor did he strive to . . . all belonged to a world that went on, under the sun, flowing and leaping and breathing, a slow unfolding and sweeping through the current, which had its own rhythm and purpose. And he belonged to it."

Yet from this calm center Paul goes on to experience a range of conflicting emotions. And it is Holbrook's particular strength as a novelist to be able to faithfully render the complex relationships that Paul must sort through during this troubled time. His parents, for instance, fail to understand his fears and ambitions and violent disagreements ensue, but their basic concern is revealed when they support him against a new martinet headmaster who is threatening to revoke Paul's association with the Maddermarket. Another relationship which confuses Paul is with Annie, his first girl. Although Annie awakens feelings of warmth and tenderness in Paul, she is unable to share his newly discovered intellectual and cultural interests, and thus at the end Paul is torn between jealousy and relief when she goes off to marry another.

Yet such struggles seem the normal fare of adolescence and should pose no special difficulties for the novel's protagonist. Holbrook, however, has a more pernicious drama in mind, namely that the adult landscape, increasingly dominated by the vacuous and trendy world of nihilistic culture and ideas, is failing to offer youth viable role models. It is this state of affairs which threatens to seduce Paul into false solutions to the problem of living, threatens to leave him in a void even as he works through

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the relationships with his parents and with Annie. This antihuman position Holbrook is attacking is embodied in Roy Short, an older school-friend of Paul's who is already up at Cambridge spouting all the "correct" left-wing slogans.

> "Short seized the opportunity to persuade [Paul] towards nihilism. A new orthodoxy took over now his belief had failed—the metaphysics of chemical and physical laws, and the Final Cause of Ultimate Entropy, of everything seeking equilibrium in death. He forgot himself . . . He forgot that all living creatures strive, and succeed or fail: by contrast with physical phenomena even thunderstorms, which do not strive, do not try to use their world, and cannot be said to succeed or fail. And he forgot man's moral dimension, even the dimension of being."

It is Roy's voice that serves to entangle Paul in various misadventures and almost brings about his downfall at the end of the novel.

Mediating this tug-of-war for Paul's loyalties are the good offices of Nugent Monck, the aging director of the Maddermarket, who stands for the translucent world of literature and art.

> "[Paul] had felt swamped, suffocated at home and didn't know why. With Monck, every moment was taken up with an energetic attention to the nature of the world, what it could teach one, how one could interact with it and change it."

It is precisely on this confrontation between the *passionate* and the *passive* that the whole novel turns. Ironically, both terms derive from the Latin "Passus" meaning suffering and submission and relating to the Crucifixion and its surrounding drama of betrayal. The modern betrayal is the nihilistic commercialism which Holbrook is seeking to expose because it renders us passive in the face of our true human passions and desires.

Through Monck's eyes Paul begins to realize how the wholeness of the imagination and the redeeming qualities of love serve to overcome man's existential anxieties. But poetry alone will save no man, and so Monck's mediating presence is imperfect at best. The "larger than life" depersonalized world, which fans our hatred and aggression and denies our vulnerability, continues to pervade Paul's thought. Yet in realistically portraying Paul's struggles, Holbrook has given us a picture of how it is possible for a youth to enter the adult world with resources deeper than the plastic facade of commercial culture which paralyzes so many other adolescents before they have the chance of knowing the wider realms of experience in love and relationship.

To explore as Holbrook has the delicate moral relationship between social institutions and the inner life of the personality is to risk a narrowness of vision because many "anti-life" forces are too easily dismissed. This in turn leaves the author with a limited scope of effective persuasion, and we should not forget that the primary task of such a moral examination is to convince one's readers that the credo one assumes in daily living will result naturally in a true and meaningful identity, that the world transformed into art corresponds to our real human experiences. What is needed to persuade, of course, is the enactment of real dramatic situations—the "showing" dimension of literature. When Holbrook's fictional voice falters, as it does on occasion, it is in part because he slips into the "telling" strategy of the self-assured upstage sermon and thus interrupts his correspondence of faith with the reader. Salvation after all must be earned, not merely asserted. These are minor annoyances, however, for in using fiction to explore problems of personal experience and development, Holbrook has undertaken a significant journey of self-definition, and like the work of all serious artists, *A Play of Passion* widens the reader's vision of the human potential, reinfuses the world with intentionality.

Holbrook's courage, in making his novel face up to the questions of value in modern society, will impress many as old-fashioned; he will gain little popularity by advocating an end to commercialism and a return to the culture of personal relationships. But to have accomplished the fine achievement of *A Play of Passion* is to have vindicated the essence of his undertaking—the continual search for viable responses to contemporary life—and in the process helped sketch out a reality in which youth's labor will not be lost. □

In *The Rockford Papers*, February 1979, Vol. 4, No. 1, Pawel Mayewski on "THE USES AND MISUSES OF POWER (Notes on Foreign Policy)":

> It is assumed that "the nuclear rationale" places upon the world leadership, in totalitarian states as well as in the democracies, something like an obligation to proceed with caution, because rash action automatically opens up the risk of catastrophe for all. In a reality where practical solutions are constantly sought, this nuclear imperative demands that we constantly keep in mind the need to compromise. We have thus willy-nilly arrived at an equation that reads something like "compromise is action." The word "compromise" today has an extremely high value and in practice becomes interchangeable with reasonableness"—a government which is willing to compromise is reasonable, a government which firmly insists on something and holds steadfastly to its position is not . . . It is this kind of reasoning, a state of mind, that seems to persuade our policy in all but the most "close to home" problems, especially since Vietnam. The notion prevails that if only one side meets the other at some point between two *a priori* positions, the problem will be solved satisfactorily.
>
> This is, of course, a paralogism and one wonders how it came to be so widely accepted. It happens very often that A is in possession of what is right, whereas B is wrong—as in the context of the Second World War. Any sane person would admit that at least in that context, compromise, *any* compromise, was bound to lead to disaster, as it in effect did, whereas firm insistence on what was right could have prevented it. The alternative to being firm when one is right is giving up at least part of one's "rightness"—with all the consequences that must follow.

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Feds & Narcs in a Comparative Scholarship

James Q. Wilson: *The Investigators;* Basic Books; New York.

by Charles E. Rice

Since the death of J. Edgar Hoover in 1972, the Federal Bureau of Investigation has been subjected to extensive scrutiny and criticism. In the process, the realities of what the Bureau actually does have been obscured. We have needed a balanced look at those realities. Fortunately, we now have it in this volume.

The author, the Henry Lee Shattuck Professor of Government at Harvard, has already established himself as a perceptive analyst of crime and police matters. This volume is a comparative study of the management systems of the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration. In Chapter One, the author analyzes the influence of the bureaucratic structure on law enforcement agencies, noting the effect of outside political influences in impeding the attention of those agencies to their tasks. Professor Wilson stresses the differing tasks of the FBI and the DEA, especially comparing the emphasis of the FBI on detection of crimes already committed and the instigation by DEA agents of drug offenses where otherwise there would be no complainants. This is one of the crucial distinctions between the two agencies, accounting for the FBI's emphasis on clean-cut, presentable agents who would inspire trust in interviewees (most of whom are law-abiding) and the DEA's reliance on agents capable of blending into the drug world and of getting cooperation by inducements and threats.

This distinction is further discussed in Chapter Two which details the day-to-day tasks of the investigators in the two agencies. "Talking to people is the name of the game," the author quotes a veteran FBI agent. "Everything else is just overhead." With the DEA, however, "the dominant strategy of these investigators is not that of detecting or randomly observing a crime but of instigating one under controlled circumstances."

One problem confronted by the DEA is that "the federal courts appear to regard narcotics trafficking about as seriously as interstate shipment of stolen motor vehicles and much less seriously than bank robbery . . ." Added to that is the difficulty created by federalism. Unlike other nations, such as France which has a national police force, or England which has a single police force for each city, police responsibilities in the United States are divided among local, state and federal authorities with often overlapping and competing jurisdictions. The author analyzes well the problems this situation creates in dealing with a drug traffic which operates without regard to political boundaries.

Wilson brings to his work a refreshing calmness and spirit of realism. He demonstrates that the use of informants is essential in many FBI cases and indispensable in virtually all DEA cases. The DEA's problem here is aggravated by the fact that the DEA usually requires its informants to testify in court, with obvious risk to the informant, while the FBI does not require its informants to testify unless they are defendants in the case. The author's treatment of informants is balanced and practical. He recognizes that only the federal government can adequately develop large interstate or international drug cases, but that such a federal role "will inevitably entail the development by federal agents of their own stock of informants." Professor Wilson takes a measured approach, too, to the subject of "dirty tricks," such as the allegations that the FBI "wrote anonymous letters designed to embarrass members of the Klan, the Black Panther Party, and various leftist organizations." He suggests that "there are circumstances in which one might reasonably contemplate authorizing such acts," but that their employment should be strictly defined and limited.

The book contains a good analysis of the difficulties involved in dealing with that undefinable category, "white collar crime." With respect to the use of informants, plea bargaining and offers of immunity, the author aptly observes, "Those observers who find such methods objectionable when employed in narcotics cases should pause before erecting their objection into a principle and reflect on whether they wish to bar the use of these methods in investigating corporate or governmental consensual crimes."

One useful point emphasized by Professor Wilson is that the desire for autonomy, rather than for larger budgets, more personnel or larger powers, is the dominant motive of public executives generally. This is true particularly of the FBI and DEA. The essential difference between the two agencies, from the perspective of their executives, is that the FBI was able to establish a high degree of autonomy while the DEA was not. He credits J. Edgar Hoover with the "great achievement" that

"There remains enough evidence . . . that fascism will come disguised as the means of suppressing illegal drugs . . . . Wilson might have exhibited more awareness of the FBI as a suppressor of civil liberties . . ."

—Nation

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"He utterly transformed a disgraceful bureau into a modern investigative agency in which personnel were selected on merit alone, held to the most exacting standards of behavior, ruthlessly punished at the first sign of improper or partisan behavior, and supported with a remarkable system of files, fingerprint records, and scientific laboratories."

Hoover's administrative system "was brilliantly successful in eliminating the obvious abuses of power and in cultivating favorable public opinion that was readily convertible into strong Congressional support. That system had as its object preventing or minimizing misconduct, scandal, and internal bickering and attracting and holding agent personnel who were competent and presentable." By contrast, the DEA has been hampered by its lack of autonomy:

"The essential maintenance problem of the DEA, after the drug epidemics of the 1960s had made its task both important and controversial, was to cope with a set of bureaucratic rivals (Customs), under circumstances that made it virtually impossible for the agency to show that it was successfully combating the problem of drugs. Unlike the FBI, it could not rely on generalized public support: instead, it was required to produce measures of its very own performance, but these measures, by their very nature, seemed to show that the agency was devoting its efforts to relatively low-level, presumably unimportant drug dealers and that it was not always seizing more drugs than its governmental competitors."

Unfortunately, since Hoover's death the autonomy of the FBI has been reduced as its immunity to criticism has disappeared:

"The unchallenged prestige of the FBI, the basis for its extraordinary autonomy, collapsed utterly, and congressmen who had once attended hearings at which Hoover testified in order to congratulate him and bask in his reflected glory now eagerly sought forums in which they could join in attacking his record and the behavior of his successors."

Under the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act, the public has gained substantial access to FBI files and the availability of informants has lessened as their risk of disclosure has increased.

The author emphasizes that the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches means that no agency can assume that because it has statutory authority to perform a mission, it will have the necessary political support to carry it out. With the collapse of the FBI's prestige, its situation is comparable to the DEA which has always had to struggle with bureaucratic rivals and Congressional critics. The author offers no instant cure for the problems of managing law enforcement agencies in a political environment. He is "suspicious," for example, of the proposal that the FBI and the DEA merge. Nevertheless, what this book does is to provide a clinical analysis of how these agencies actually operate. It should be read by those who would weaken the FBI and DEA as well as by those who would strengthen them. □

Commendables

Colwin's Nonconformism

Laurie Colwin: ***Happy All the Time;*** Knopf; New York.

This is the greatest little manifesto of nonconformism since time immemorial. It's an open sedition against the Libcult's literature. Normal people are in it who are both reasonable and happy, and who form warm, engaging fictional characters to boot. They challenge every tenet of the *High Times-Rolling Stone-Vogue-Time* civilization, sounding more amusing than convincing, but we want to read about them and have them around—which is impossible but which we would love. The updated Wodehousian daftness once again triumphs over freakishness and, perhaps, opens new vistas of entertainment which should invade the pop scene to save us. It is as if P. G. Wodehouse was resurrected in Manhattan of the late '70s to challenge the morbid idiocy of liberationism and permissiveness with his invincible sense of edifying eccentricity that enriches instead of neuroticizing man, woman, society. Here is a world in which women set the code and tenor of love, and well-balanced, good men with a sense of humor and achievement accept it as life's big reward. There's nothing new in it. Ms. Colwin only rediscovers the oldest truth—that man's greatest pleasure is begging women for their emotions and commitments—a truth cruelly smothered by the modish feminist din in arts, letters and canards. When Ms. Colwin attempts to spoof some more general social and behavioral mores, her stylistic acumen loses assurance; dealing with individual, even if cosmeticized, shades of a not-too-complex existence, she brings joy to the reader. The only drama of Ms. Colwin's novelette is that people meet, and we look forward to these encounters with a suspense usually reserved for seduction and murder.

She also manages to wisely supervise the texture of the most common human feelings, and even provides some insights into the everlasting commonness of the traps of human nature—no mean feat for an entertaining novelist. Ms. Colwin succeeds in making shallow sentimentality a desirable option, and she does it with the help of wit and irony and incisive vignettes about her characters telling more and better than sour treatises—a great gift to this troubled

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nation. Examples:

> " 'Friendship is not possible between two women one of whom is very well dressed,' said Misty."

> "The fact was that, while Misty was moral, Vincent was good . . . the good do not necessarily have to maintain morality: they are born with it, while people like Misty, who were not good, had to strive mightily for goodness. That was what a moral system was: it helped you be good when you weren't very nice."

In the time of the investigative sociology of *Ms. Magazine* and the existential analysis of *Psychology Today*, it is heroic to express a literary view that life can be rewarding without becoming idiotic, simply by practicing goodness and normalcy. Ms. Colwin thus becomes a sort of savior of a civilization without ever intending it—which of course, boosts both her credentials and her deserts. □

In Focus

693 Pages of Waspish Weltschmerz

John Cheever: *The Stories of John Cheever;* Knopf; New York.

A giant volume in excess of 380,000 words of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant nostalgia for mental and moral coherence. And not one single sentence about what to do next, how to proceed to rescue, refurbish, renew what's left, how to preserve those imponderables once called values. Or, at least, how to treasure a mood, a merit, a sentiment, or a principle which may be helpful to restore, rebuild, rehabilitate the nerve, the vigor, or, at least, the sense of being. One does not even suggest any talk about moral fiber—such a proposition would elicit a languid smile from the Cheever folk, a bemused melancholy which hides behind polite amusement. The frailty of purpose is for them if not a virtue, then at least a mark of high-minded civility.

It is a literature populated by delicate, beautifully drawn human profiles to whom practicality and rationality mean little, the fabric of bygone, now incomprehensible, glories, now just camp. Melancholy, boozing, failure of communication, insensitivity, divorce, generation gap—all these make for shallow sufferings; it's not fate, injustice, history, or human evil that defeats Cheever's heroes and heroines: they turn into pathetic, not poignant, losers as if licked by their own faint grins, the "impossibility" of living.

John Cheever commands a paramount talent to deuniversalize Waspishness. Under his touch, Waspishness is reduced to folklore, ceases to enjoy the status of a cultural metaphor. The anti-Waspish revisionism in Waspish letters was nothing extraordinary with Melville, Wharton, James, but it never turned dismissive. Cheever's Waspishness is sort of slenderized, an affliction rather than a condition, drained of even a sarcastic pride. The Waspish ethos and experience, as we know it from Hawthorne to Hemingway, produced a robust American humanism, and was so endowed with universalism that it bred feelings of admiration from the world at large; its moral and spiritual teachings are now in mankind's pantheon of enviable postures and poses. Cheever's literary intensity, its formal qualities and sentimental temperature notwithstanding, seem to validate only the affable race that now inhabits Westchester County and lower Connecticut. One can look for a message in a microcosm, but it's difficult to find one in provinciality: the former can turn out an all-human parable, but the latter can never transcend the status of a travelogue through social landscapes.

The only benefit from this apotheosis of courteous impassivity thus remains the insight into the infrastructure of disintegration: the bane of the '60s, with all its suicidal derangements of thinking and living, becomes painfully discernible. It is certainly unfair to blame a writer for what he did not want, intend and choose to write, but in this specific case, taking into account Cheever's talent and our common knowledge of what has happened to the Cheever Wasp specimen (and his progeny) during the last two decades —one has a distinct feeling that *something* is missing from these stories. And a nagging question emerges: Why? □

Maugham on Maugham

Robin Maugham: *Conversations With Willie, Recollections of W. Somerset Maugham;* Simon and Schuster; New York.

W. Somerset Maugham was one of this century's most popular writers, achieving great fame and success and their rewards. Yet what stands out in this poignant little memoir by Maugham's nephew, Robin, is a vivid picture of a tormented soul: "I'm not even sure if I'll be read in a hundred years' time . . . They may find me old hat . . . My success means nothing to me. All I can think of now are my mistakes. I can think of nothing else but my foolishness and I've made mistakes all along the line. And the awful thing is if I had my life to live a second time, I'd make all the same errors all over again . . ." Variations on this theme are uttered throughout the book, as Maugham reflects on his life; despair and pain frequently break through his arrogance and caustic wit.

Maugham's evaluation of his life as a failure seems startling since he achieved so much as a writer; several remarkable novels (*The Moon and Sixpence, Of Human Bondage,* and *The Razor's Edge,* among them) and popular

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plays, a huge body of short stories, many of them first-rate. Yet rejection of all he achieved, the basic meaninglessness of worldly success and recognition, is not so puzzling when one realizes that escape from the world is a motive appearing frequently in his work. An artist escapes to the South Seas *(The Moon and Sixpence)*, a young man escapes the world, via Eastern mysticism *(The Razor's Edge)*, and Maugham himself made repeated attempts at escape. His extensive worldwide travels to the most exotic places, and his intelligence service during the First World War—experiences skillfully transformed into art—were means to escape a rigid and authoritarian middle-class background. His disastrous marriage was an attempt to escape his homosexuality. Robin Maugham even suggests that Somerset Maugham's becoming a writer was an escape from his stammer, an impediment which caused him enormous humiliation, rendering him inarticulate and forcing him to transform the spoken word into the written one. Maugham writes of his uncle: "But the most important influence on Willie's life was his stammer . . . It is almost certain that without his stammer Willie would not have been a writer; he would probably have become a lawyer—like his brothers. Willie's stammer made him reserved, it forced him to remain an onlooker, it made him into a detached observer of life who became the first person singular of his writing. His stammer made his prose pithy, crisp, and succinct. His stammer made the dialogue of his plays neatly turned and well-balanced. Perhaps his impediment made his fame."

But all these attempts to escape himself ultimately prove futile and Robin Maugham, simply and effectively presents a portrait of the artist as an old man, and an unhappy one. (MEF) □

Waste of Money

In and Out of Bed and War

Pamela Sanders: ***Miranda;*** Little, Brown: Boston.

Oh no, not again! Not another feminine novel, clearly auto- or at least semi-autobiographical in which the author evades potential accusations of narcissism by claiming the story fictitious.

The book jacket blurb tells you everything you might learn from the novel:

> "Miranda Pickering is charming, urbane and beautiful—a jet-hopping journalist of the mid-1960s calling on heads of state in Southeast Asia, accompanying combat missions across Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, cajoling *Time* magazine bureau chiefs from Saigon to New York, and attracting men in droves . . ."

Except that Miranda has a problem: her heart belongs to Daddy, and it is his elusive approval she searches for as she compulsively jumps from bed to bed. Until she finally realizes that Daddy loves her—and in a way a little less than kin and more than kind—she can never be a genuinely liberated woman.

This banal psychologizing of an utterly trite character is silhouetted against a changing landscape reminiscent of all those travelogs where the sun sinks slowly into the west; the reader is given

"Sanders is a fine and funny writer."
—*Library Journal*

guided tours of the Philippines, Hawaii, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam. Only scenes presenting Philippine terrain and *mœurs* command some interest, while an extended affair Miranda has with President Sukarno is so excruciating it becomes camp. Journalistic portraits of thinly disguised Western newsmen, and a not at all disguised Madame Nhu are supposed to lend an air of sober credibility to a flabby narrative. It is all embarrassingly inappropriate, as if a Barbara Cartland or a Rosemary Rogers heroine, suddenly cognizant of her flippancy, would begin to immerse herself in the philosophy of Schopenhauer or the abortion issue. (MEF) □

Screen

Hydrolyzed Horror

Invasion of the Body Snatchers; **Directed by Philip Kaufman; Written by W. D. Richter; United Artists.**

by Eric Shapearo

A good scare as art and entertainment, from Eurypides to Hitchcock, has always been induced by its relation to realities—either human or existential. The departures from realities into fantasy, cruelty or dramatic suspense must never lose their link to factualities by flouting logic—which is a part of reality—lest shoddiness overcomes the supernatural, and a horror tale simply becomes idiotic. When it happens, Yiddish slang has an expression for it; it can be translated into something like "stupid old woman's stories," which may carry a horrible antifeminist calumny, but is not fully devoid of accuracy.

The producers who cranked out this movie departed from the surrealistic premise of an extraterrestrial invasion of a feebly defined species which, once on earth, turn humans into nonhumans by means of repulsive biological tricks. They (the producers, of course) locate the action in San Francisco and pretend that everything is as in real life. But what's repugnant is not necessarily scary, and there's a distinction between nausea and horror which seems to elude

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the artists who created this one, so the story finally results in inarticulateness. Even the skill of intimation is, in this movie, sleazily deficient and ineffective: the audience does not know exactly why the hybrid monsters gestated by the invading pods sometimes talk and at other times can utter nothing but a savage howl, or why San Francisco is totally devoid of the premier power of American reality—the ubiquitous media—which would notice what, from the first credit lines, so obviously happens to people and their right to know.

What's perhaps more interesting are the personal opinions propounded by the director, Mr. Kaufman, who in a press interview, explicated what kind of metaphor *he* had in mind in his opus. The product of the pods, he says, is "conforming to the faceless society," and he adds: "Nixon is a pod . . ." He compounds this article of faith with an allocution by the protagonist of *Invasion*, who certainly plays the *porte parole* to Mr. Kaufman. At one point, while describing something freakish that might have happened to someone, he says: "Did he turn homosexual? Has he become Republican . . .?"—thus we know who we have the honor of dealing with. We may also assume that Mr. Kaufman is unfamiliar with Tolstoy's words in *War and Peace* about the "infinite variety of human minds" and "that there are no two men in the world who would perceive the truth identically." Which makes me think that, to my mind, Mr. Kaufman's outer space pods have achieved perfection on earth in his own comrades of the '60s, who so facelessly and with the same blank stare in their soulless eyes used to chant: "Peace Now! Ho Chi Minh! Power to the people! Make love! . . ."

It may be that the movie has been conceived as a protest against totalitarian collectivism and uniformity, but Mr. Kaufman is not Ionesco, *Invasion* did not turn out to be the *Rhinoceros*, and the overall effect is a film about boring automatons who neither sing nor dance but nonetheless pretend to be entertainment. □

The American Scene

Insights by Leaders

A curious remark by Dr. Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, a scholar and man of piercing intelligence, according to the press which is inclined to probe this side of his personality:

> "I think that there has been some genuine progress worldwide with regard to human rights—in part, because of what we [the Carter administration] have been doing—in part, because it is the genuine historical inevitability of *our time.*" (Emphasis added).

This seems a startling persuasion. Montesquieu and Jefferson, Garibaldi, Marx and Comte, then Zola, and of late, Bertrand Russell, all assured us that human rights were the genuine historical inevitability of their time. Concurrently, we had Catherine the Great, the genocide of Armenians, Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, Gulags, Auschwitz, Mao, Castro, Reverend Jones—to mention only the better-known cases. So much for inevitability.

Myths Die Last

In the *New York Review of Books*, Professor Graham Hughes, New York University, reviews *Criminal Violence, Criminal Justice*, by Mr. Charles E. Silberman. The book has attracted attention and was praised in the liberal press for its antidogmatism, although we found that it diverged unconvincingly from the old liberal schematics. Grounded in a heavy and costly research, Mr. Silberman's work concludes with a sigh of apathy and incertitude: considering all sociocultural variables, not very much can be done to remove the scourge of violent crime from our reality. This conclusion is not enough for Professor Hughes' conscience: he somehow resents Mr. Silberman's inadequate use of clichés and would prefer more accentuation of racism, social inequality, irresponsiveness to the needy, etc., as the main factor in exegesis. He writes:

> ". . . No very dramatic reduction in violent crime is likely until the psychic trauma created by social inequity and the broader neurosis-generating character of American life are significantly modified . . . We must dynamically seek to bring about basic social reforms that might dilute the sour bile of nihilistic anger. Such serious and far-reaching changes hardly seem likely."

Messrs. Silberman and Hughes, whatever their differences, complement one another. They both conveniently disregard moral attitudes—in this case, the liberal ones—as components in forming sociocultural climates conducive to crime. Mr. Silberman notes that the decades between 1930 and 1960 witnessed a dramatic decline in violent crime as a part of social reality at large, while the '60s and '70s observed a catastrophic and frightening proliferation of the most senseless criminal acts. The former period was one in which children were trained by an American primary educational system which still insisted on the values of morality and conduct. These allegedly corny and pedestrian ethics were unanimously and unflinchingly supported during the same period by both the high and popular culture: philosophy extolled social pragmatism; books, plays and movies insisted that crime was heinous, while its pursuit in the name of law was noble and rewarding. In the '60s,

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philosophers and balladeers perceived in crime the impulse of righteous protest—be it against injustice, or boredom, or the constraints of civilization. National magazines began to speculate that there must be some justification in equating past centuries of racial and ethnic abuses with the current robbery and murder in the streets. The sensationalistic voyeurism of the media conferred a celebrity badge on any act of even the cruelest bestiality: if a teenage girl's forcible defloration with a bottle is shown to an audience of millions, even with a "didactic" purpose, one can be certain that the event will be reproduced somewhere, sometime, by someone. Liberalism reveled in an orgy of acceptable permission, but instead of breeding virtue, it disintegrated society's natural propensity to condemn, punish, and combat evildoing by every moral and legal means at its disposal. But our feelings about this liberal ethos seem trite to Mr. Silberman and his critic: they both suspire in unison: Each society has the crime it deserves, and ours is a very, very, very bad society. But even Professor Hughes mentions that Salazar's Portugal was virtually crimeless. Was it a better society than ours? It certainly was poorer, and not liberal at all.

Is it true, therefore, that some nonliberal social moods and attitudes may bring better solutions than the liberal regulatory recipes? And please, gentlemen, don't give us your usual bombast about how it is better to be free than to purify Central Park by force! At least not before you confront your freedom principle with the revenants of those stabbed to death because they had no more than a dollar bill during the neighborhood's routine mugging. We do not pretend to know the all-encompassing solution, but it seems to us unlikely that there's no linkage between the crime wave and such cheap liberal homilies as the one expressed by a certain Mr. Philip Kaufman, a radical film director, who, recently interviewed in the *Chicago Tribune*, moralizes:

> "In some cases, when you research the legendary outlaws, you find that they were fighting against an unfeeling society . . . Movie criminals typically have more life than the townspeople who usually have had the life drained out of them by conforming to a faceless society . . . I think people want to escape from normality. Everyone recognizes the growing stagnancy that's around."

and then proceeds with making movies that carry this "morality" to the generational surplus of teenagers. While the *Chicago Tribune* goes into raptures:

> "It is refreshing to talk to a socially committed filmmaker like Kaufman."

The Virtue of Modesty

Not long ago, the *New York Times*—a fussy organ when it comes to printing letters to the editor—demurely printed the following missive from a certain Arthur C. Holden, of Washington, Connecticut.

> "To the Editor:
>
> During the long period when the Times went unpublished, it seemed that the character of public opinion suffered a decline. Perhaps we have not adequately recognized how this whole nation depends upon the intellectual stimulus that is furnished by New York's leading newspaper.
>
> The weakness of the thinking that has been bandied about while the Times was muzzled is typified by the growing confusion and apparent helplessness respecting inflation."

How strange! We always suspected that it was the overwhelming power of the *New York Times*' socioeconomic thought which was among the main causes of inflation. And we would consider it in poor taste, if not an epistemological embarrassment to depend upon the *Times*' intellectual stimulus in forming our opinions. Which probably makes us, in the eyes of the gentleman from Connecticut, not a part of the "whole" nation.

A Too Easy Equation

Gunther Grass, a ponderous German writer who, in his prose, practices morose grotesqueries and believes them to be exercises in irony (the overall effect is quite boring), gave an interview to *The New Republic*, which listened to his words with awe. We read there:

> "Why is no one [in America] discussing Vietnam anymore? The danger is you will lose this war a second time—once militarily, then psychologically. After a lost war, you have a chance to win it again in another way if you have courage enough to be sad about it, to be pushed by it, and not to hide it after a short while. Germany after World War II wanted to forget too. But whenever the wound tried to close, the writers opened it—too early to forget, we said."

It's preposterous to say there's no discussion of Vietnam in America: it obviously still goes on, but, what's more important, it went on with a fierce passion *during* the war—a political and cultural phenomenon that may appear mythical in its libertarian spirit to a German. Furthermore, Mr. Grass seems to be saying here that what Americans did in Vietnam should be put into the same category of moral and psychological interpretation as the German cold-blooded murder (not killing in action) of circa 15 million people in World War II. In other words: that the Americans want to forget the same thing that the Germans wanted to forget, but conscience-stricken authors like Grass have not let them. This, to our mind, is a pretty insolent statement, one which transfers Mr. Grass from a category of sensitivity of mind and soul into the category of particular obtuseness of mind and soul. Once upon a time, this spiritual tactlessness used to be called Teutonic, and we thought it an attribute

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of the past, lately cured by history's painful experiences. We are thus quite disturbed to find it again in a writer of Mr. Grass' caliber and influence. Especially in the light of the latest, quite alarming, news from Germany about the sinister revival of Nazi mystique among German youth—which would indicate that the "psychologically" victorious German writers of Mr. Grass' stripe are not as keenly attuned to the ideological and moral realities as they think they are.

Political Instincts & Emotions

The Illinois Legislators' Pay Raise Scheme—increasingly reminiscent of the first Great Train Robbery—does not go away. Pros and cons, and all other deliberations occupy the public consciousness and prey upon each citizen's mind. The press, unusually in tune with the general feeling and on the common man's side, keeps presenting it as a political issue, which gives an opportunity to some columnists in perennial pursuit of originality to side with the extortionists — politicians — increasingly reminiscent of the gentlemen-robbers of centuries ago. However, the issue is not political, but moral. Men and women who profess to be elected on the merit of their moral virtues, among other things, should not fleece those whom they pledge to serve. Their ethical feelings should compel them to restraint, especially in times of economic hardship, even if they themselves feel a pecuniary stress. Which is rarely the case in Illinois, as the majority of characters in this morality play are well-off, white-collar professionals, whose financial revenues are far above the average incomes of their constituents.

Let's try to go beyond Illinois' confines and ask: Should an elected official be rewarded according to the general principles of the money market and wage-price reality? We mused long over the problem, and finally came to the conclusion that he should not.

Since its dawn, democracy has posed the dilemma of the people's representatives impudently lining their pockets at the expense of those they are supposed to represent and govern. The obvious solution would be to make public office honorary, an occasion to exercise idealistic propensities and personal altruism, to gather fame and respect. However, fears arose that such an arrangement would bring might to wealthy power-seekers, and we all know what that means. It was concluded that attracting able and talented men by properly rewarding their spirit, virtue and acumen would guarantee a better polity, promote personal brilliance, and would keep government from becoming the preserve of the rich.

It did not work. The government has become a preserve of wealth, prestige, and media age celebrity status. As of today, there is no semblance of any real and serious social correlation between the moneyed statesmen and the not moneyed classes. The District of Columbia, the central situs of politicians and political bureaucrats in America, has the second highest income per capita in the country (after Alaska, which has only half as many people). The defenders of the poor are now *very* rich legislators for and administrators of the poor, which makes everybody wonder whether they defend the poor for their money, or perhaps for other reasons which are not easy to perceive. Under these circumstances the most credible defender of the poor, his shrillness notwithstanding, becomes Senator Kennedy, a multimillionaire. At least, we can be certain with him that he yearns for power, but certainly not for money.

Half of the U.S. population does not vote in elections for political offices, and it appears more and more that the abundantly evidenced greed of politicians has something to do with it. It is beginning to dawn on the people of Illinois that the best answer to America's political ills may be to rebuild the civil service as a vehicle for idealism and virtue, with the rewards of duty fulfilled and glory for remuneration. Especially when they see their newly-elected governor pocketing his raise and taking off for a Florida beach during the worst winter blizzard in the history of this state. Moral attitudes anyone?

Two Cultures

The gap widens and it is not our fault. The liberals persist in ignoring the fact of an intellectual effort in this country which produces analyses, critiques and cognitive inferences in every respect, but which is not theirs. These are nonliberal observations, conclusions and messages, and the liberals, in their manipulation of the media, have decided to pass over them in silence.

The *New York Times Book Review* announced its list of the best books as the editors' choice for 1978. All titles, both in fiction and nonfiction, belong to authors and works with a distinct liberal profile, vision, persuasion. Among the 25 books nominated by the National Book Critics Circle, made up of 200 reviewers and editors from around the country, for their annual award, there's not one single name that deviates from the liberal orthodoxy in any area of writing, and many whose only desert consists of strict adherence to this orthodoxy.

More than ever, America is split into two cultural spheres of eminence, influence and imagery. The liberals decided to eliminate the nonliberal intellectual and literary activity by ignoring it. This does not mean the victory will be theirs. More powerful bastions of opinion than the *New York Times* and the professional fraternities have withered away simply because they were either wrong, or immorally suppressive, or both. We'll wait.

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Journalism

New Times' Timely Demise

New Times died not long ago, and we have little reason to mourn it. It was a sequel to the '60s journalism of social conscience for instant sale, and its end reads like the dispersal of the acid fumes that beclouded the American mind for more than a decade. The '70s proved not to be exactly the new times which *New Times* had expected. The market for pseudointellectual toxins has apparently died out, there seems to be a scant demand for the "investigative" bromides of journalists who supplanted reasoning with sniffing and specialized in killing the objective correlation between thought, fact, truth and their cultural images. In its day, *New Times* was uniformly against the hard-hat and for the snail darter, it hated the CIA and adored the ERA—an obtuse, loyal storm trooper of modish sagacity. Like every Manhattan bigot, any independence from liberal platitudes had to be stamped out in the name of vigilant anti-imperialist, anticorporate ethos. During its existence, *New Times* only once came up with a quasi-commendable enterprise: it documented Larry Flynt's physical and moral hideousness, but drew no conclusion from its own findings.

New Times exited as it lived—mendaciously twisting social phenomena and forging a misrepresentation. Its final issue was entitled "Decadence—The People's Choice," and it featured prevaricative articles to prove that America has become decadent because its people wished it so.

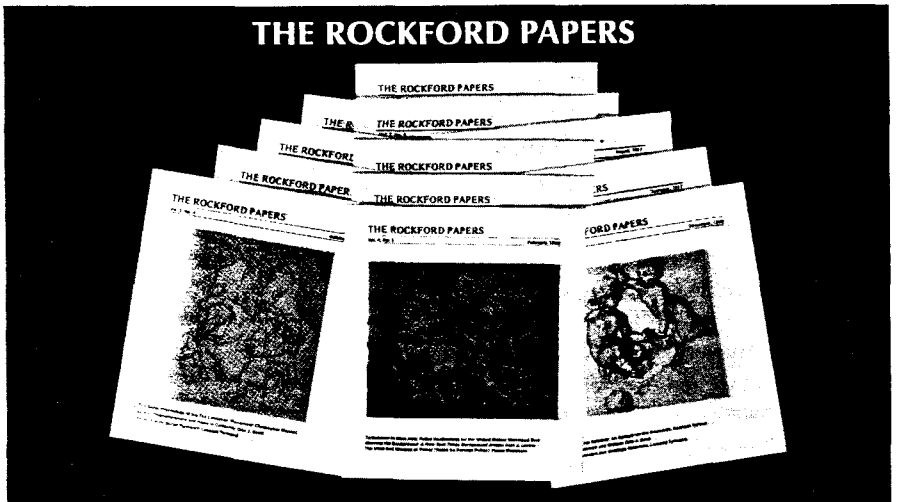
It is difficult to point out a single culprit in what happened to America during the last 15 years: the guilty and the victims drown together in a din of accusations and explanations. However, to us, at the Rockford College Institute, the opinion-making industry looks like a prime villain.

Ever increasing its formidable power during the '60s, this industry never condemned *anything*—as *anything* was supposed to *go*, be reported, and spread around as the news of freedom, unfettered choice, enlightenment, progress, or even overdue justice. Quite quickly, the uncondemned turned into the promoted, and the American psyche, dazed by media hype, became a helpless prey of phony "revolutions" and "liberations." The future editors and writers of *New Times* were among the most ardent promoters. They now refuse any part in the misdeed.

The Pontius Pilate gesture now makes a career in the American press. *Time*, one of the mightiest and most cynical purveyors of decadence, disclaimed any partaking in spreading the "philosophy of permissiveness" by writing:

> ". . . permissiveness [was] made possible only by the acquiescence of a majority of Americans . . ."

as if *Time* had contributed nothing to this compliance. Now, *New Times* describes as "The People's Choice" its own propaganda of every excess, transgression, freakishness, and deviation. Mr. Hirsch, founder of *New Times*, was a publisher of *New York Magazine* when it began its crusade against any norm and every value embedded in Western social tradition. Any opposition to the chintzy hedonism of *New York Magazine* and its acolytes was branded in its pages as fascist, any distaste for its crass commercialism denounced as bourgeois torpitude. Now, in its last issue, Mr. Hirsch's *New Times* bewails: "Norman Rockwell does not live here anymore . . ." and sheds crocodile tears for conventional innocence, as if its editors were not the same media mob which had stoned the Rockwellian vision and message to death in the '60s. They now bewail the illiteracy of the Prince-



In the February 1979 issue, Mahmood Butt on "TURBULENCE IN WEST ASIA: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES":

The explicitly secularist, materialist, and anti-traditional character of the contemporary American culture and political rhetoric has become increasingly obnoxious to religious societies throughout West Asia. In spite of its materialist and atheistic philosophy, Soviet Russia may well appear to Moslem traditionalists less culturally offensive than the uninhibited, libertine tendencies of American life. While Moslem political leaders on the whole favor neither communist totalitarianism nor Soviet control, they do have a profound commitment to such cultural and social values as the sanctity of the family and public modesty.

None of these Moslem views is alien to an orthodox Christian or Jew, but given the dominance of the permissive culture in the United States, the traditionalist outlook of Moslem society may find little sympathy.

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ton students, as if they had nothing to do with all those demented antics by radical Ivy League faculties when they nonnegotiably clamored for revolutionary conscience as curriculum. By that time education was seen by the liberals as a process of full equalization (in rights and value) of the educator and educated, and those who insisted that moral training was inseparable from knowledge were branded as reactionaries. The concept of "educational relevance" resulted, naturally, in illiteracy, but what did *New Times* write then about American minorities? Did they ever oppose Marcuse, Stokely Carmichael, Leary and the Yippies, Kate Millett and Radical Chic, sexual communes and the Rolling Stones? Hard to find such a record, yet they now bemoan American decadence.

Decadence is essentially the destruction of norms—moral and behavioral. A certain Ms. Judith Coburn writes in *New Times* on "Trafficking in Innocence—The Child as Sex Object":

> "The essence of decadence is lack of feeling."

and concludes:

> "The current fascination with childish sexuality is yet another manifestation of the backlash against demands for women's equality."

Radical followers of Ms. Coburn's "thinking" easily get the message, of course: wherever "feeling" is involved, there's nothing wrong with copulating with children, molesting toddlers, etc.; it's not the seekers of the thrills subtly intimated by the pink press, nor the publishers of *Show Me*, nor the deranged "psychiatrists" from California, nor the filmmakers extolled in *Women's Wear Daily*, who are guilty of kiddie porn, but the opponents of ERA. *New Times*' own film critic had viewed *Pretty Baby*, a movie quite dedicated to "trafficking in innocence" with flaming admiration: its "approach is cool, almost chaste," he wrote, and deplored the fact that "[it] received a barrage of invectives from do-gooders and know-nothings." That's how *New Times* opposed decadent cultural acts against children.

The present wave of decadence came to America not through a surfeit of power, nor through the fascination with corruption by wealth, whose uppermost reaches have been decadent for more than half a century; power is constantly challenged here by emerging elites and minorities, wealth is now more evenly distributed than ever in America. Decadence came to America via ideas: the idea of cultural egalitarianism as a "liberating force," the idea of a value-free society at large, one that should participate in everything its uppermost reaches do, even degeneration. These ideas were largely embraced by the liberal media. Decadence of the '70s is not an effect of social moods of satiation and excess, but an ideological phenomenon, brought into being by openly engineered ideological trends. The liberal left in this country bears the full and clear-cut responsibility for it—it is *its* creation. The annual sets of *Village Voice*, *New York Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and later—*New Times*—contain indelible and irrefutable evidence of how it was brought about. It began with the grotesque *Carmagnole* on California campuses and it soon reached the radical chic drawing rooms in New York: the children of the wealthy upper classes, encouraged by ultraliberal faculties at prestigious universities and enthusiastically supported by the communication-entertainment complex which "reflects" the state of the society, initiated the nonstop descent. The disintegration of standards of normalcy and good sense followed. We now have Lillian Hellman, the ultimate procommunist symbol, modeling for the fur industry—the ultimate in luxury. Looking at Ms. Hellman's worn face grinning from a super-expensive mink coat—the ultimate token of commercial hedonism—and realizing that her riches are a reward for her lifelong travails to help Stalin, one can't help but be certain that decadence is upon us, and it is of the left's making. □

Liberal Culture

Another Schism?

An excerpt from *Mother Jones*, an openly promarxist journal with a penchant for strongly worded opinions:

> "So it is entirely likely that the young right-wing aerospace worker of today had a wild-eyed Socialist grandpa back in Oklahoma. And while Ronald Reagan would call that a classic American success story, I can only say that history is sometimes just a pain in the ass."

How unbecoming! Everybody knows that till now history was on the side of Marx's admirers, the Kremlin, the proletariat, the Communist Party, the pinko radicals, and the subscribers to *Mother Jones*. Did something go wrong? Has America and its system jumbled up something in the allegedly invincible historical blueprint? Is the revolutionary and schismatic theory about pains in the rear end the new class consciousness in the making?

Transfiguration Boogie

Pauline Kael, a liberal and a film critic, is presently taking full advantage of the aura of the era, and explains with the help of sexual symbolism, or mythology, every human yearning, every quiver of soul, and every motion on screen. She thus becomes a practitioner of

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modish nymphomaniacal criticism, highly appreciated among the liberal commissars of *Vogue* and *The New Yorker*. Her reasoning has the gracefulness of disco dancing, and it runs into peculiar mental arpeggios, as the following conclusion of her review of *The Deer Hunter*, an obviously masculine movie, demonstrates:

> ". . . but Michael, the transcendent hero, is a hollow figure. There is never a moment when we feel, Oh my God, I know that man, I am that man."

To our traditional recognition, Ms. Kael is *not* that man, as she is not *any* man, and never will be. Whatever the temperature of her wishes and efforts to be a man, the unfair order of nature makes it a bit difficult. That goes for physical characteristics as well as for the so-called general feelings as they are conveyed by art and theoretically should know no confines of gender. Sorry to say, however, but there are limits to all identification processes in literature and drama. The unifying force is not absolute, and *something* will remain forever closed to Ms. Kael's insights and sensibilities. Empathy has hermetic subdivisions, and not even *Ms. Magazine*, ERA, and President Carter's profeminist machinations can accomplish a transfiguration by social legislation. Men, for example, are also pretty deficient in penetrating the boundaries of feminine fantasies.

The Teachers of Subtlety

Mademoiselle, a monthly dedicated to breeding vulgarity, stupidity and sartorial fashions amid bovine women just under twenty, runs two remarkable features in its January issue. One is a stirring essay entitled "Sex: Is It Finally Time to Shut Up About It?" by a subtle writer named Mary Ellen Banashek, who demands more delicateness and sophistication in matters of tender feelings and their projection through specific channels of the human soul and body. Ms. Banashek uses quite explicit—one is tempted to say titillating—dialectics to argue her cause: her mission, however, is to spread her powerful intellectual discovery that things sensual can gain in attraction and depth when approached with discretion, poetry, allusion and such other heretofore unheard-of devices of refinement.

Another feature is a column by a certain Ms. Judith Coburn, a disheveled feminist, apparently in a constant search for carnal satisfaction. She advocates the most direct approach to extorting services from men, often called "grabbing" by people in professions that deal with street violence. Ms. Coburn's column is called "The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Sex," which is an inadvertent title, if it was consciously approved by *Mademoiselle's* editors. Do they really think that an intelligent woman would read their publication?

Life & Death

Of late a certain Mr. Tom Forcade has died, allegedly by his own hand, and, though it's not our custom to badmouth the departed, it is to be said, honestly, that he personified all the filth of the '60s. He threw bombs for the SDS and Weathermen, helped Hanoi install communism in South Vietnam, participated in many acts befouling the United States. He finally became the big honcho of the drug subculture, the oracle of the Consolidated Poisoners of America, founded *High Times*, the mass-suicide organ, and became a financier of NORML. The best addendum to the horrible idiocy of his ideas, life, and ultimately, to the characterology of his entire human pattern, is that as a correspondent for the Underground Press Syndicate, which by definition denotes illegality and rebellion, he fought the White House for his official accreditation and congressional press gallery credentials—and he won. The *Village Voice* calls him, in eulogy, a "Radical Romantic."

In another article, Forcade's buddy bewails his demise. The author is all in tears. Through unusual verbs he expresses his grief:

> "The news of Tom's death upset and destabilized me. I never thought [he] would end like this . . ."

If he had asked us, we could have told him that, to our way of reasoning, Mr. Forcade would end like this. □

Polemics & Exchanges

Our Destructive Moral Climate

by Tibor R. Machan

The moral climate of a culture is one of the most powerful influences in the lives of people. It rules what can be thought of as right or wrong in the conduct of the citizens and the character of the institutions of a society.

The moral climate is fostered mostly by the media—including publications, broadcasting—and the various forums of ideas—e.g., schools, universities, churches, and the political arena. Those who are prominent in these areas set the moral tone of a culture. Should anyone oppose this tone, the action involved will be disapproved unless given very special consideration or regarded as unimpressive. For instance, when a corporation brings in large profits, this is generally regarded to be improper within our present moral climate, so it needs to be justified as something special,

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good for the public interest, essential to the nation's security, etc. Or when a book like Robert Ringer's *Looking Out For Number 1* becomes popular, it is either dismissed or regarded to be unworthy of serious comment, despite the fact that it does run against many of the precepts of the prominent moral outlook.

In the present United States, for example, there prevails essentially two moral currents. One is altruism—the view that everyone's primary duty is to help others, especially the needy. The other is nihilism—the view that values do not matter, that nothing is really worth anything other than how one happens to feel about it. And in both cases we find that the enemy is human happiness. The irony is more of a tragedy. The nation built on the idea that everyone has the natural right to pursue his or her happiness is ruled by the moral imperative that others' happiness is what we ought to pursue or by the denial that anything ought to be pursued at all.

Perhaps the second prominent view on morality, namely nihilism, can be explained as a result of the hopelessness of the first. If one is constantly told that one's duty in life is to live for other people, but in fact one just cannot live with that principle as one's standard, one will either have to change the principle or give up morality completely. Those who have been most harshly assaulted with the altruistic outlook have been the members of the business community. They have worked hardest to produce, to seek profit, to achieve values that are obviously and widely desired. So they are the people who have been preached to about their duty to the world, to the needy, to the poor, to the helpless, etc. From the Right and from the Left, the bourgeoisie has been denounced. Both Charles Baudelaire and Karl Marx thought business was vile. The former believed that "Commerce is satanic, because it is the basest and vilest form of egoism," the latter held that "it has resolved personal worth into exchange value."

With this kind of harangue against them, the members of the business community and those who study it, economists, have turned their backs on morality. Economists claim that all of us are simply ruled by private interest. There is really nothing else but our personal preference that accounts for our behavior. As Milton Friedman put it recently, "The great Saints of history have served their 'private interest' just as the most money-grubbing miser has served his interest. The private interest is whatever it is that drives an individual" (*Encounter*, 11/76). Thus, whether the moralizers and moral philosophers who support the altruistic doctrines are really correct, it is not surprising that those involved in business and most economists simply regard morality as meaningless. If science tells us that we are all moved by self-interest, well then moralizing has no impact anyway. The explanation for this faulty reasoning could well be the cynicism that comes from having tried to live by an impossible moral code.

For that is what altruism is. The view doesn't just claim that there is virtue in kindness and generosity but that charity is *the first virtue* we must practice. But that is absurd. For if this were true, not even those being helped could accept the help. Mankind would have to be a never-ending daisy chain of self-sacrifice. No one would be aided if altruism were true and consistently implemented. It is not even an impossible ideal but an impossible nightmare.

The truth is that human beings need a morality that can make living good *and* possible. This morality would involve a substantial dose of self-interest. But the self-interest would differ from what many take it to be—sheer callousness, "selfishness" which emphasizes thrills and "quicky" pleasures. Yet pleasures and well-being would be part of this morality. Indeed we should seek these, in moderation.

Most important, however, to human life would turn out to be the pursuit of happiness. And this would come to pursuing those goals that are proper for any human being—e.g., success in one's family life, career, and other general ventures—and for the individual—e.g., teaching for those so inclined, tennis for those with this talent, and business with those good at this profession. There need be no fear that murder or cruelty can be personal goals because these violate general human virtues—e.g., honesty, productivity, and the respect for everyone's rights as a human being.

This is a moral code in which pursuing health and personal welfare is considered not just tolerable but imperative. It would back up those who want *to make it in life, to succeed, to profit.*

But the likelihood of this morality becoming prominent soon is miniscule. Too many people like to live off the sweat and labor of others, especially among those who are in the business of talking about morality, of writing on ethics and how people should live their lives. Nevertheless, it is imperative that a morality that encourages human success and survival, as opposed to one preaching constant self-sacrifice, becomes the main current in our moral climate. Evading it for much longer will produce just the results that can be expected, namely, the sacrifice of the best in all of us, our concern with success as human beings. □

Molnar Revisited

by Paul Gottfried

For most conservatives, the Biblical story of the Fall contains an existential truth, a recognition of basic human limitation. For Thomas Molnar, a Catholic philosopher, the Fall is something to be affirmed in two senses: as an histori-

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cal event to be certified by Christian faith and as a cultural phenomenon related to man's overweening pride. Although others may see no connection, Molnar would insist that the rejection of a theology of the Fall, and of divine redemption, has brought about a secondary Fall, the breakdown of Western culture. The scorning of Christianity and the current cultural crisis are both to be seen as functions of the prevalence of humanism, a philosophy based on human self-perfection. At least in the modern era, humanists have ended up repudiating ethical absolutes and theological truths alike.

In his earlier works, Molnar treated the various humanist alternatives to Christianity as parts of a gradually unfolding vision of human self-deification. Whatever the differences between the Renaissance linguist Pico and the 19th century revolutionary Marx, both thinkers ascribed to mankind titanic, and indeed, godlike, capacities. The evolution of humanism unfolded as anthropocentric thinking became wedded to a view of social perfection as in the works of Rousseau, in Hegel's belief in human omniscience, leading to Comte and Marx, and, finally, to Nietzsche's ethical nihilism. All the same, Molnar would contend that the seeds of utopian politics and moral relativism could already be found during the Renaissance and even earlier.

In *Christian Humanism* he extends his cultural criticism to include those who would mix two incompatible cosmologies, the one Christian and the other militantly secularist. According to Molnar, humanism has invaded Christian institutions and journals. In the name of reconciling man's earthly and religious aspirations, Christian humanists have, among other things, sown dissension within the Catholic Church. As a Catholic traditionalist, Molnar holds no brief for the innovating forces within his religion, and he stresses that much of what is described as modernization simply involves the substitution of aging humanism for Christian teachings. This last point is made repeatedly, for Molnar never tires of showing the antiquity of humanist arguments whether discussing the Marxism of Latin American priests or analyzing Biblical demythologizers and the so-called Christian evolutionists.

One provocative aspect of his study is the attempt made to locate one source of the humanist challenge to Christian theology in the senescent pagan world. Faced by the spread of a disagreeable Judaic cult popular among foreigners and slaves, the non-Christian representatives of Greek and Roman antiquity engaged in a rearguard intellectual struggle. Much of their effort was directed toward defending pagan mystery religions; but they also produced a body of critical literature designed to attack Christian tenets. Molnar cites the second century Roman, Celsus, who upbraided Christians for the ideal of a suffering savior. He argues that these censures anticipate the later humanist disgust—evident in both the young Hegel and Nietzsche—with a deity that is neither joyous nor carefree. The "scandal of the cross" is a burden later humanists would reject, symbolizing as it does the sinful condition of unredeemed man as well as the vulnerability of the Christian God. In my opinion, Molnar makes a weak case of linking the Neo-Platonism of which Celsus was an exponent, with the modern humanist contempt for Christianity. Neo-Platonists, unlike Marx, despised Christian theology because they thought it degraded divinity: because, in the words of Plato's *Republic*, it ascribed to "what is unchanging by nature" the "predicates of an inferior [i.e., human] being." Nor did Neo-Platonists hold to anything resembling the modern belief in man's natural goodness. Most of them accepted some variant of Plato's myth that earthly existence is thrust upon the soul as expiation for evils committed in a previous life.

Molnar stands on firmer ground in stressing the Gnostic roots of modern political ideology. The ancient Gnostics departed from normative Christian thought by viewing the world as intrinsically evil and the Church as a repository of second-rate revelations. Believing themselves in possession of divine illumination, the Gnostics aspired to the fullest understanding of Providence through solitary contemplation. They also tried to calculate exactly when the world would end: for they imagined divine light would soon transform the realm of darkness which surrounded them. Like Eric Voegelin, Molnar notes a structural similarity between Gnostic theology and utopian ideology. Like his Gnostic predecessor, the modern ideologue scorns the world as he finds it. In place of historical reality, he asserts the rightness of an ideal order which he sees as being inherent in the future. Having proclaimed the inevitability of what he hopes for, he attributes his vision to a higher wisdom inaccessible to ordinary beings.

Although Molnar too often condemns as well as explains, his stress on the persistence of mythic constructs goes far toward clarifying the appeal of political utopianism.

The Renaissance revival of pagan thought not only gave impetus to science, but perhaps even more significantly, provided new life to ancient superstitions. Esoteric prophecies, dreams of restoring mankind to primeval goodness, and alchemical hopes for transmuting the material world: out of such stuff were formed the fantasies of many Renaissance humanists. And out of similar stuff has come the perfectionist and utopian cast of modern politics. The illusion of what is today defined as Christian humanism is viewed by Molnar as being one further variation on a theme almost without beginning. □

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